

GOD IN HISTORY



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# God in History

By

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Guest Professor at  
Princeton Theological Seminary



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TO  
RALPH E. STEDMAN, M.A.; PH.D.  
*Friend and Colleague*

## PREFACE

THIS volume is based substantially upon the course of lectures, given under the auspices of the trustees of the Croall Lectureship, which I had the privilege of delivering at New College, Edinburgh, in April, 1936. The material has been partly rearranged and, among other additions to the original text of the course, Chapters III and VIII are entirely new. On this occasion I want to express my sincere gratitude both to the trustees of the Croall Lectureship for their distinguished invitation and to the authorities of New College for their kind and generous hospitality.

The aim of this volume is to give a survey of history from the Christian point of view and in the clear light of Biblical revelation. It is not, however, my purpose to offer a philosophy or theology of history—an exposition of the elements of history, of the laws which govern it and of the factors which are operative in it. I have performed this latter task in the Stone Lectures, which I delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey, in February, 1938, and which D. V. will be published in the not too distant a future. Nor has Christian eschatology been treated explicitly here, although its views underlie the whole survey given in this volume. But I felt, I think rightly, that the subject was too important and too complex to be dealt with merely incidentally. In our days, when so much confusion reigns concerning eschatological



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problems, a special book would be needed to treat this topic adequately.

The bibliography given at the end of the book is not exhaustive. I hope, however, that it will serve as a helpful guide to those wishing to do some further studies on these subjects.

I must not pass by in silence the encouragement and furtherance which I gained from that brilliant group of Welsh ministers and laymen under the leadership of Professor Ernest Hughes and Professor W. Moses Williams, to whom I had the great pleasure of lecturing on similar topics at Swansea University College during the Spring Term, 1936. By their faithful fellowship, their lively and critical discussions and their thoughtful suggestions, they have helped me considerably to a clear and unambiguously Biblical view of the whole complex of problems.

I acknowledge also with deep gratitude the kind help which I have received from Mrs. M. A. Barkas, whose unfailing friendship and indefatigable coöperation have meant so much to me and to this volume.



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## INTRODUCTION

CAN a man take part in history, as its agent or its object, without being vexed by its perplexing nature and by its elusiveness? Can he study history without being filled both with marvel and with horror?

On the one hand, we all know—and every morning we learn it again from the daily papers—how much the course of history depends on human factors: shrewdness and wisdom, foolishness and incapacity, highly idealistic aspirations and all kinds of vicious desires. The gastric troubles of a prime minister, for example, may delay the rapprochement of two nations for years; or the fits of a neurotic may result in war that will bring ruin to nations.

And yet we all feel instinctively that this is not the whole truth about history. It contains a factor which transcends the merely human agency. But what is the nature and the power of this transcendent factor? It seems to elude human investigation and to escape generalisation. Men have given it all kinds of names; Hazard (Tyche), Right (Dike), Luck, Law, Moral Order, Fate or Necessity, reflecting thereby their respective experiences at certain times; or people have interpreted history as the work of gods or demons, which were thought of either as working according to law or as following their whimsical inclinations, predilections and prejudices in governing human affairs.



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Apart from Biblical religion, however, no satisfactory description of this transcendent factor and of its relation to the human agency in history has ever been offered. In all naturalistic religions, that is those religions in which divine honor is conferred upon the powers of nature or their personifications, man himself is regarded as a part of nature. Thus the specific character of man's activities in history, by which he differs fundamentally from nature, remains unnoticed. The same criticism holds true of all modern evolutionistic and materialistic philosophies. When poetry, for example, is explained as the more or less pathological result of gland activities, when the technical insight of man is said to be identical with the instinct of termites, when human enthusiasm, love and heroism are interpreted as ways by which the man-animal readjusts its instinctive desires to its environments, history is substantially identical with life in the jungle. Equally unsatisfactory are the interpretations of those who emphasise the work of necessity in history and identify this necessity with the natural order in general. The spectacular and sublime idea of a world-year, for example, based upon the revolutions of the starry sky, which was held in ancient Babylon, substituted the idea of a recurring process in nature for that of history with its continual novelty. Spengler, who brought this fascinating conception back to the modern mind, declared, therefore, that the belief in individual agency in history was sheer delusion.

Outside Biblical religion, Zoroastrianism was the only theistic religion in which an adequate attempt was made to deal with the problem of history. The conflict of light and darkness, goodness and evil was regarded as the basic theme of the world-process, and man's historical activity was thereby

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made the center of world activity. But while, for the structure of history, this religion offered a scheme which was worth discussing, it contributed nothing to the understanding of the actual course of history. Chronological schemes which are apt to form the nucleus of a conception of history are found in some nations, for example in ancient China, Greece and Rome. Yet, among the gentiles, the Romans were the only ones to develop a comprehensive view of their own history from a teleological point of view, for example Vergil and Livy. Even they, however, did not proceed beyond this idea and strive after an explanation and interpretation of their own part in history, nor did the idea of a world history ever come into their minds.

As a matter of fact in Biblical religion alone is the significance of history profoundly understood and its nature satisfactorily explained.<sup>1</sup> In Biblical religion, Christianity exceeds Judaism in the clarity of its outlook, because the Incarnation has shed an entirely new light upon the historical process. It is not surprising, therefore, that it is specifically in the modern western world that the notion of history has developed its full growth. Christian thinkers have merged the Biblical view with that of Roman historians and poets and thus obtained a comprehensive vista both of secular and holy history.<sup>2</sup>

The Bible not only offers a theory of historical life, but also and primarily supplies the records of an historical process

<sup>1</sup> Islam is no peculiar type. Its view of history is based upon the Bible, but is marred by fatalism.

<sup>2</sup> We prefer "holy history" to the traditional term "sacred history" because what characterises this realm of history is the activity of persons who share the holiness of Christ rather than a record of the fate of sacred institutions and objects.



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which, by the mercy of God, has become the center and focus of all other history. An adequate understanding of history requires, therefore, knowledge of, and insight into this focal history, and particularly into those most significant events which took place in the life of Jesus Christ. Holy history is not one of the many departments or periods of history, it is their heart and hidden center, and all other history moves, although it may be more or less unaware of this fact, in its orbit.

One should, therefore, expect to see Christian theologians and historians everywhere starting in their interpretation of history from holy history. But during the last two centuries a remarkable change has taken place. Under the influence of rationalistic philosophy, once the idea of a law of nature had been substituted for the Biblical conception of the will of a personal God, scholars ignored the specific significance of holy history. Hegel, who to many seemed to have established a new synthesis between Biblical and modern philosophical thought, brought Christian theology to a most fatal crisis, for he blinded many of the ablest scholars to the true significance of holy history. His use of the deductive method could be legitimate only if the explicit knowledge of God were an original datum of the human mind. Under Hegel's influence, T. H. Green and Caird, Baur and Rothe and Harnack, Einar Billing, Berdyaev, R. Seeberg or Tillich all committed the same fault; they started from the idea of a personal God of holiness and righteousness and deduced actual history from these divine properties; that is to say, they all made holy history, including the cradle and the cross of Jesus, merely illustrations of the movements of the divine mind, analogies of

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which they found in all departments of history.<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to notice that in modern Catholicism, where the problem of history had long been neglected, theological writers tend at present to similar views.<sup>4</sup> Christopher Dawson is a remarkable exception.

Under the influence of contemporary philosophy the lofty elations of Hegel's deductive method gradually degenerated into historical positivism with some whimsical admixtures of rationalistic philosophy. Hence those schools of theology which called themselves historical, for example the Historical Critical School and the School of Comparative Religion (*Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*), not only completely lacked understanding of the significance which holy history had for the rest of history, but ultimately destroyed the notion of history itself. By men such as Bousset, Gunkel, Weinelt, J. Weiss, historical achievements were not regarded as the products of an organising and reflecting mind, but rather as the contingent outcome of the hazardous movements of their contingent antecedents. While the elder Hegelian type was still prepared to treat the historical facts reported in the Bible as particularly valuable illustrations of general ideas, these modern historians, on the contrary, taught that the more clearly the evidences of their respective periods could be discovered in Biblical events, the less valuable they were for religious purposes. For history was deemed to be the realm of transition and relativity. It was in vain that Troeltsch,<sup>5</sup> who realized the weakness of this position, tried to stick the plasters of an anemic speculation upon

<sup>3</sup> See F. L. Patton, *Fundamental Christianity*, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Theodor Haecker, *Der Christ und die Geschichte*, Leipzig, 1935; or Franz Sawicki, *Geschichtsphilosophie*, München, 1923.

<sup>5</sup> Ernst Troeltsch, *Der Historismus und seine Probleme*.



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the open sores of this kind of historiography. The effects of this "historism," which has crept into the most remote recesses of modern Protestant thought, are discernible everywhere; Christian belief has thereby been widely transformed into mere morality or into a certain kind of emotionalism, or into naturalistic or psychologistic forms of mysticism. It is more or less consciously realised everywhere in Christian thought that these unhistorical views have led religion into an impasse, and all manner of attempts are being made to bring it into the open again. But while Karl Barth, for example, and his school have reacted very strongly against this deplorable development, they have, nevertheless, in my opinion, stopped half way. There are numerous instances in Barth's writings which show that, in common with both his liberal and orthodox opponents, he is afraid of acknowledging the intimate connection which exists between revelation and history.

On the other hand, it seems that the modern mind, tired of the dullness of positivism, is now prepared to embrace an endless amount of speculation. But, to mention only one case, the ideas which Nicolaus Berdyaev sets forth in his writings,<sup>6</sup> the spell of which is felt by so many modern theologians, issue from theosophy, not from the theology of revelation. This writer starts from the idea of a process in God himself and describes history as the reflex of a tragedy going on in God. But Berdyaev's speculations are gnosis and presuppose a knowledge of God which would transcend His self-disclosure in history. The same holds true of the many modern attempts to

<sup>6</sup> *The Meaning of History*, Geoffrey Bles, The Centenary Press, London. *The Fate of Man in the Modern World*, Student Christian Movement Press, London.



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make definite and detailed statements about the judgment day. They all presume that man is able to take council with the eternal God. It is flattering to the individual to ascribe such knowledge to the human mind, but it is the presumptuous attitude of those who aspire to resemble God. Revelation obliges us, in all humility, to remain within those limits which God Himself has set to our knowledge.

The only group in Protestant theology to maintain the central significance of holy history was the School of *Heilsgeschichte* (Holy History, History of Salvation), which, from the middle of the eighteenth century, for a hundred years, flourished in the south of Germany. Its principal representatives were Bengel, J. T. Beck, Joh. Chr. K. von Hofmann, Carl Aug. Auberlen.<sup>7</sup> In the following chapters we shall adopt the views of these men so far as the modern development of exegesis and theology will allow.

It is, therefore, our aim in this volume to describe history from the Biblical point of view. Yet for this purpose it is not sufficient simply to repeat the stories of the Biblical records, and to confine ourselves to investigating the underlying principles and the supernatural structure of Biblical history, as the "Heilsgeschichtliche Schule" did. It must not be overlooked that the authors of the Biblical books recorded certain events for a contemporary public who were aware of history in the surrounding world, and who were, therefore, capable of appreciating the apparent arbitrariness in the selection made by the Biblical writers. In order to make right use of the Biblical records we must deliver the stories of the Bible from the isola-

<sup>7</sup> See Gustav Weth, *Die Heilsgeschichte*, Chr. Kaiser Verlag, München, 1931.

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tion in which they are at present and put Biblical history into the whole of history. Only by so doing can we show how holy history is both as natural as any other history, and at the same time is at variance with it, being divine interference with history.

Methodically, the Christian survey of history offers a perplexing paradox. We do not commence it with a description of the beginnings of history, as the Old Testament does, but rather we must start with an exposition of the historical function of Jesus Christ. When we first comprehend the significance of His coming in the fullness of time, we shall be enabled to understand all history. That which preceded Him was the preparation for His advent, and all the sequence of His life was the continuation of His earthly activity.

If, instead, we started from Adam and followed the order of the Old Testament records, we should apparently be more in harmony with orthodox theology but it would in fact be a relapse into Jewish thought. The Old Testament survey of history, while unsatisfactory from the Christian point of view, was entirely in accord with its time, because it then corresponded to the stage which Israel had reached in Revelation. We, on our part, must start from Christ, since He is the goal of history. We shall then be able to discover the teleology of all history. The Jews who were ignorant of the actual fulfillment that history was to find in Jesus Christ, had to record history in the same way as the gentiles did, namely from the past towards the present. But the Jews themselves were taught by the Holy Spirit that the purpose of historiography was not merely to preserve the recollections of the past. In the Old Testament, history was written in a retrospective way for the



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purpose of its spiritual understanding. The historical portions of the Pentateuch, for example, were not merely meant to give an enumeration of the events which preceded the conquest of the Holy Land, but rather to show the working of God's Providence, by which history developed towards that great triumph for Israel. That is to say: even in the Old Testament, history is written from a teleological rather than from a causal point of view. And it conveyed to the Jews only a preliminary and fragmentary knowledge of God's will in history. Things are different with us who have Jesus Christ. For He is the consummation of all prophecies and divine promises given in the Old Testament. Hence His life, which is both the complete self-disclosure of God's purposes for mankind, and an historical event as well, enables us to know the forces which are at work in history, the reason why its nature is what it is, and the goal towards which it moves.

## CHAPTER I

### IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME

#### A. THE BIBLICAL CONCEPTION

**A**CCORDING to the Gospel of St. Mark I:9, Jesus began His public activity by preaching the good tidings and saying: "The time is fulfilled (*peplerotai ho kairos*), and the Kingdom of God is at hand." The close connection between the ideas of the fullness of time and the coming of the Kingdom must have been an essential element of our Lord's message. St. Paul confirms it <sup>1</sup> when he says: "When the fullness of time (to *pleroma tou chronou*) came, God sent forth His Son." <sup>2</sup> The idea of the fullness of time has its origin in the Babylonian conception of a "world-year" which comes to an end and will be succeeded by a new one. The time process was there thought of as a cyclic movement, corresponding to the revolution of the starry sky. The idea was held that when once the whole circle had been accomplished, this world, which had waxed old, would make a fresh start, in new strength and perfection.

A similar conception underlies the Biblical notion of "fullness," yet it shows marked differences as well. Both ideas imply a definite structure of the time process; but in the Bible it is connected with the conception of a personal God Who carries out His plans in history, while in Babylon the process

<sup>1</sup> Gal. IV:4.

<sup>2</sup> See also Mark XII:6, Rom. V:6, Eph. I:4, Hebr. IX:26.



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was thought of as governed by impersonal necessity. In the idea of cycles of time, history is regarded as a natural process, similar to a succession of pools in a river bed. The water which has filled the first of them will overflow and fill the second, the third, and so on; but the process in itself will always be of identical nature. Thus people imagined that the new world-year would be pleasant in its beginnings, but would necessarily degenerate in the same way as the first had done and the final stage would be intolerable again. On the other hand, this whole process would depend entirely on cosmic movements. No creature would be able to be good and fresh and in a state of integrity when the wheel of time had turned towards its last phase. The Biblical conception of the time process, on the other hand, involves the idea of human freedom and responsibility. According to Biblical doctrine, too, a period of history comes to an end. But the "New Aeon" which is to succeed the "Old Aeon" is not its repetition but rather its continuation and consummation because its principal agent will not be a mechanical power of nature, but "He Who has life in Himself." Moreover, while the cyclic theory of history assumes that there will be an infinite number of successions of world-years, the Bible teaches us that the New Aeon is the final period of history, at the close of which there will be the end of history.

Thus the Biblical idea of the fullness of time implies four elements:

- (a) The previous period has come to an end;
- (b) the fullness of time is a symptom of the divine dynamic which is operative in history;



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- (c) it thus points to a divinely fixed structure of history which manifests itself most clearly in the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies;
- (d) it marks the beginning of the New Aeon.

### B. THE END OF THE OLD AEON

The New Testament states emphatically that Jesus was the Christ Who came in the fullness of time. Those to whom the New Testament was first brought, obviously experienced immediately what this statement meant. Paradoxically enough, it is no longer so with us. In the course of centuries Christianity has transformed this world to such an extent that we no longer realise how fundamental was the change which Christ wrought in mankind. We are, on the other hand, in a position to furnish ample historical evidence confirming the belief of the apostles who regarded Jesus as the fulfillment. History itself proves that these men did not hold mere opinions, but rather were taught by the Holy Ghost himself. Our present historical knowledge enables us to show that the coming of Jesus Christ marks the end of ancient world history and the beginning of a new period which is determined primarily by His activity in history.

#### *1. Consummation of the Ancient World*

The moment when the Son of God made His appearance on earth was the most remarkable that the world had ever seen. For then, for the first time, mankind was offered the opportunity of a common history. Until the time of Christ there had been no world history. It is true that technical knowledge had gradually spread over all the world. The fact that almost

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everywhere we see the successive use of flint, bronze and iron for the fabrication of tools and weapons, certainly presupposes such intercourse between the different groups and races of mankind as would enable new techniques to make their way from any point of the world to its furthest parts. But this development of technique did not bring about a feeling of unity among men, or a common activity in history. Only very slowly and gradually did men become aware of the fact that, notwithstanding their national, religious and cultural differences, they had something in common which might enable them to have a common history. Again it took mankind a long time to reach the moment when universal tendencies converged—tendencies which manifested themselves in the different departments of historical life. This decisive historical event took place in Palestine in the days of Jesus, when Jewish religion, Greek civilisation, and the politics of the Roman Empire were brought into contact. Then for the first time religion, civilisation, and political organisation attained to full self-consciousness, and all their essential potentialities were realised. We can say without exaggeration that no entirely new principle has been introduced into human civilisation since that time, however considerably the details of the application of the existing principles have been altered. Mankind intuitively felt that the historical development had reached its climax. In Jewish religion strictly personalistic monotheism was firmly established, coupled with the idea of a highly spiritualised moral law binding all worshippers equally. God's dealing with man was regarded as taking place in history, and thus the exceptional position of man in the universe was accentuated. Eschatological expectations emphasised the anomalous



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character of the present state of the world and filled man's heart with lofty aspirations. Community life was shaped in full accordance with religious beliefs. Every man was entreated to join this religion, which admitted of no racial, national, cultural, or social barriers. In no other ancient religion do we find such a clear conception of the nature of religion and the object of its worship.

While the Jews had concentrated deliberately upon religion, and regarded civilisation as being of secondary importance, the Greek genius, on the other hand, had aimed at civilising the whole life of man. The Greeks had discovered that, thanks to his reason or understanding, man was something quite unique in the world, and differed fundamentally from the whole of nature. Every department of human life was therefore subdued to reason, and thus the Greeks were able to utilise all the cultural attainments of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor and Syria, and to integrate them all into a new and comprehensive system of civilisation. After the days of Alexander the Great, Hellenism spread like wildfire over the whole Mediterranean area and superseded local and national civilisations. It could appeal to all because it assumed that every man was by nature a rational being and therefore called to share in this universal civilisation. By its belief in the rationality of the universe it delivered man from the bondage of the powers of nature, and introduced simplicity, harmony, and the spirit of order everywhere, thus making man proud of himself and life worth living. No other system of civilisation has been able in the long run to resist the impact of the Greek genius. Our whole western civilisation is based upon its principles.



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Finally the Roman Empire, after having conquered what once had formed the empire of Alexander the Great, had inherited its cultural legacy and its universal outlook. But the Romans showed their superiority to the Hellenistic kings by establishing a comprehensive system of administration and legislation throughout their whole empire. A well-disciplined army put down all attempts at disturbance and assisted judiciary and executive authorities, but did not unduly molest the new provinces. With a few exceptions, the Romans left national institutions and traditions untouched, but embodied all of them in their political system. This combination of centralised administration and legislation, with freedom of development for the provinces, proved to be very satisfactory both for the central authorities and for their subjects, and for more than four centuries Rome presented the Mediterranean world with the precious gift of the *Pax Romana*. Its foundation was the Roman law. The Romans were the first to realise that the safest way of keeping a country in subjection was generosity in granting the Roman franchise, and equal rights and privileges, to a relatively large number of citizens of the conquered countries.

Christ's lifetime, as we have said, was distinguished by the fact that these three universal forces—Jewish religion, Hellenistic civilisation, and the Roman Empire—were in existence. Yet they would not have been able to assist the coming into existence of world history had they not converged towards one another. In Alexandria and other places of the Near East, Judaism and Hellenism came to a mutual understanding. Hellenistic civilisation, at that time, recognised the central rôle of religion in man's life; it was, moreover, aware of the

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fact that reason and moral goodness necessarily belonged together, and finally, it realised that there must be one comprehensive principle uniting reason and reality. Thus, the monotheism of Jewish religion did not encounter great obstacles when it entered into contact with Hellenism; Philo of Alexandria was a remarkable example of that assimilation. The complete absence of any cult in the religious services of the synagogues, on the other hand, made it easy for many of the educated gentiles to take part in Jewish religion. Similarly, Hellenism and the Empire were brought together. It was Hellenism that had created the idea of an empire on the basis of the equal rights of all its citizens. The later rulers of the Roman Republic and the Roman Emperors, on the other hand, were conscious of the wholesome significance which a universal civilisation would have for their administrative work.

Yet, notwithstanding this mutual convergence of the universal forces of that time, an obvious tension existed between them. Moreover, their barrenness prevented them from bringing about great new achievements. We can now see retrospectively that these facts were the result of a clash between the immanent tendencies of these historical forces and the purpose which God had for them when He brought them into existence.

### 2. *Fatal Tensions*

Because of the strong tensions which prevailed between these three historic forces, the hour in which the unity of mankind seemed to be achieved was in fact the most critical of its history. For these forces were in danger of weakening one



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another and thus of preventing mankind from attaining a common goal. There was among the Romans a lack of understanding and appreciation of human personality. They valued a man according to what he contributed to the well-being of the Empire. His private life was irrelevant from the political point of view. Furthermore, while the Empire made use of Hellenistic civilisation, it was not directly interested in its development and thus left it to the fortuitous support of some wealthy individuals. Moreover, the Romans thought so entirely in terms of the Empire that they subordinated religion to its purpose. Thus emperor-worship seemed to them the only needful religion, and those religions which were unable to incorporate the worship of the Divus Augustus into their systems, were persecuted.

Hellenistic civilisation, on the other hand, was built upon an idea of man, according to which his individual life was all-important. After the collapse of the city states of Greece, philosophy no longer regarded political activities as essential to the perfection of man's nature. This tendency was further accentuated by the fact that the administration of the Roman provinces was in the hands of a bureaucracy appointed in Rome. Notwithstanding the fact that the Roman Senate was not abolished, there was no longer scope for political activities among the citizens. In such circumstances Hellenistic civilisation was bound to create an attitude of indifference towards the State. Furthermore this civilisation was unable to understand the nature of true religion as displayed in Judaism. While theoretically it held monotheistic views, belief in one supreme principle was practically only the acceptance of a philosophical theorem, which was not infrequently coupled



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with all kinds of superstitions. Similarly, the insight into the moral aspect of truth was interpreted in a humanistic way. The idea of a God-given law was deemed to be incompatible with man's freedom. Even the highest type of morality, namely, Stoicism, was therefore a glorification of man's natural existence rather than an attempt to raise man above nature and to place him directly before God. The majority of Jews, finally, even when they adopted the Hellenistic civilisation, showed open contempt for the "heathen" and, while making ample use of the facilities which the Roman Empire offered them for the development of trade, were implacable in their hatred of it. Thus the tensions between these three great forces threatened to destroy even the actual unity existing in the Roman Empire.

### *3. The Barrenness of the Old Aeon*

The critical character of the historical situation at the beginning of our era was further increased by the fact that these great universal powers proved to be unable to progress. The great effort which they had made to work out the abiding principles of historical life had so completely exhausted their strength that they were not capable of carrying out their own program or of applying their principles to new conditions. In order to maintain themselves in existence they interpreted their principles in such a way that these were practically transformed into contrary ones. At the very moment when mankind seemed to have reached a climax, with the gate to a great new future open to it, it became increasingly unwilling to continue its mission and was on the verge of historical suicide. The destruction of Jerusalem and, later, the collapse of the

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Roman Empire and of ancient civilisation were but the outward signs of a process which had been going on long before the days of Jesus. Historians have frequently been deluded by the apocalyptic hopes of that age. They thought the expectation of a new world-year, or of a Saviour, were tokens of a juvenile optimism, while in fact they were symptoms of despair. Man felt himself the slave of supra-empirical powers and therefore incapable of bringing about an improvement in the plight of humanity. Since history itself had become a burden to him, he placed his hopes in some miraculous change.

Entire absence of new and original thoughts was the outstanding feature of philosophy in general. The element of unrest and the thirst for a full and pure life which had once given birth to philosophy had vanished. Philosophy became a means of justifying the actual life of the philosopher, or a learned profession, or a pastime. The same sterility became manifest in the religious life of Hellenism. The quest for intellectual clarity which had accounted for the rapid rise of Greek philosophy, gradually led to intellectualism in religion. Gnosis, that is to say, the satisfaction of man's "metaphysical curiosity," took the place of worship. Another symptom of this process was the spread of "religions of redemption." When the old religions had died, men suddenly felt themselves impotent slaves of supra-empirical powers such as Death, Fate, Ignorance, Hazard, or Sin. They still believed in religion as a mysterious means of overcoming these powers, but no longer practiced it as worship of divine beings, and thus they quickly embraced a new religion when that which they already had, proved to be useless or of doubtful benefit. This development of religion manifested how entirely worldly



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the outlook of mankind had become. As a result of this change men were no longer able to enjoy art in itself.

Similarly, the idea of the Roman Empire rapidly lost its attractive and inspirational power. When the Roman Empire first came into existence, people welcomed it passionately as the fulfillment of their expectations. But the idea under which the Romans conceived their Empire deprived it of creativeness from its very beginnings. For it was no longer a *Res publica*, a commonwealth; it was an organisation made to satisfy the will for power of its emperors and their generals. Its subjects endured its reign because they profited from it. But although many of them even prided themselves on being Romans, they would no longer have died for it. No wonder that it could not stand the first great test—the invasion of the Teutonic tribes.

Although the Jewish religion contained all the elements which made for a successful universal religion, it had barred for itself the way to such a development. It is true that it attracted proselytes from the gentiles; but the success of its propaganda was due to the pitiful state of religious life in general and to the mysterious attraction of its age-long revelation, rather than to its own actual conception of religion.

Thus mankind offered everywhere the same aspects: great and promising tendencies were in existence, but they led practically to a halted and eventually to a retrograde development, in other words to a disintegration of history rather than to the universal development which they had seemed to promise.

### 4. *The Need of Redemption*

Yet the failures of Hellenistic civilisation, Roman imperial-



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ism and Jewish religion were not merely deplorable developments of history like so many others. The fate of mankind was at stake in the first decades of our era. For mankind, instead of attaining to a stage where it could find satisfaction in its existence and achievements, had by that time exhausted all its potentialities and was in a state of absolute helplessness.

### *(a) Feeling of Helplessness*

Many people felt more or less dimly that life offered them no further opportunities. I do not think that at any other period of history had mankind realised so clearly that it was in need of redemption. For never before had it attained to such a clear view of the evils and limitations of man's life in the universe. People realised more or less vaguely that the evils which beset them were intolerable. For they knew there was something superior to their actual existence which was worth striving after, yet which, in spite of all their efforts, they were unable to attain. This dissatisfaction and this longing for something better were the general characteristics of that age. People called this goal by different names, and they aspired to it in different ways; they showed thereby that they were ignorant of the true nature of the object of their yearning. The realisation of their ignorance increased their feeling of helplessness and dissatisfaction.

This process had started with the great Greek tragedies. They showed an insight into the callousness and cruelty of the universe which has hardly been matched since, and never surpassed. Later when the religions of the Near East were amalgamated with Hellenism, in the various systems of gnosticism, it became evident how profoundly men were aware of the ab-

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surdity of fate and the incomprehensibility of the powers which govern the universe. People could no longer shut their eyes to the fact that these powers disliked and hated man and attempted to annihilate him, and that hence he must live in a continual state of fear.

Moreover, the rapid increase of the number of proletarians in the big cities made life meaningless for the majority of the citizens, the more so since there was no hope of bringing about a real change of the situation by an overthrow of the small ruling class. The pressure of taxation and the decline of economic life, both of which were the result of the military exigencies of the Empire, caused people to look for a stateless organisation of mankind.

Furthermore the citizens of the Roman Empire instinctively realised that their state had become so burdensome because there was something wrong in its moral structure. The Empire was a state which deified itself regardless of the metaphysical dignity of man. On the other hand, how should men be able to vindicate their moral claims, when the actual attitude which the state took towards them was necessary, although it was based upon a wrong principle? For in a world of moral decay, on the one hand, of subjectivism and individualism on the other, the only means of keeping the community together was the display of force on the part of the central authority.

### *(b) Moral Disintegration*

Another reason which made people long for redemption was the moral condition of society. I am not thinking, in the first place, of the moral degeneration in the Roman Empire. Its extent probably has been grossly exaggerated, for example



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by Sir James Bryce.<sup>3</sup> To speak accurately, the moral and cultural situation was hardly ever so bad in the Roman Empire as it was in the last stages of the Assyrian and Egyptian Empires.

Nevertheless, the moral situation was particularly precarious at that time for two reasons. First of all, immorality, which in the days of Amos, for example, had been the outcome of an unruly temper and natural wildness, was now due to the application of generally taught ethical principles. Men believed they were able to be moral while denying the existence of social standards which were at the same time ethical obligations.

In this respect, Judaism was but little better than the pagan world. Even as the Hellenistic world felt no obligation to bring the good of civilisation to the barbarians—let them come to us!—so the Pharisees had no understanding of the moral situation of "sinners":—let them perish! Moreover, no voice was raised for the miserable proletarians, who lived in the slums of the big cities.

### *(c) The Failure of Religion*

This critical situation was further aggravated by the fact that people grew aware of it, yet lacked new constructive ideas to overcome the crisis. Rationalistic humanism which had created Hellenistic civilisation abdicated at the moment when its help was especially required, and fatalistically surrendered to the powers of history or else abased man to a pleasure-seeking animal.

When secular civilisation failed so utterly, many people turned their eyes again towards religion, which for a long time

<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Roman Empire*, p. 12.



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had been regarded as a matter of convention or as superstition rather than as a requisite of the higher life. All the nations of antiquity secretly or openly suspected their gods of not being as powerful and well meaning as seemed necessary to their worshippers. People vaguely imagined the existence of an unknown God; but how could they worship Him since His existence was only a postulate of reason or of practical needs? <sup>4</sup> Thus religious yearnings rather sought satisfaction in the "mystery religions" which were imported from the Near East, and which represented a dim mixture of the worship of certain forces of nature and of Hellenistic philosophy. But owing to the influence of the latter, the subjective element in these mystery religions became too strong to satisfy man's desire for religious certainty. Hence syncretism took place, that is to say, people tried to obtain by an accumulation of religious beliefs or cults what they were unable to obtain from a single religion. It is unnecessary to say that such attempts were bound to be failures. How can man find peace and quietness of soul when the starting point of his religion is distrust in its efficacy? Once the existing religions had exhausted their potentialities, there was no hope of finding new ideas by means of combination. For the criticism of the philosophers had destroyed, not only the old national religions, but "natural" religion as well.

Judaism at that time was in an equally unfavorable position. The strong emphasis laid on the eschatological aspect of religion was a symptom of the fact that temple worship and meticulous observation of the Law were deemed to be insufficient. But neither apocalyptic calculations nor philosophical

<sup>4</sup> See August Norden, *Agnostos Theos*.

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speculations as set forth by Philo, for example, could yield satisfaction. They only paved the way for the degeneration of Jewish religion into a type of gnosticism.

### *(d) Conclusion*

The result of our survey is then as follows: Hellenistic civilisation, the Roman Empire, and Jewish religion contained in themselves the elements required for the formation of a world history. The fact that they were brought into mutual contact at the beginning of our era cannot, therefore, be regarded as a merely fortuitous event. Yet because of their one-sidedness, their lack of understanding of the historical situation and their sterility, they created a situation which tended to accelerate the catastrophe of mankind.

Thus the three great universal institutions of the ancient world began to weaken one another. The political rulers questioned the independent value and the autonomy of civilisation; philosophy undermined both religion and the state. Religion usurped the place of philosophy and thus quenched the desire for true knowledge. Moreover, by a strange development, these three institutions finally defeated their own ends. Hellenistic civilisation terminated in traditionalism on the one hand, irrationalism on the other. The legions which had formed the strong arm of the Empire, became eventually its masters, so that the Empire existed for the army and its generals, until it succumbed under the impact of the barbarians. Jewish religion finally, as a result of Pharisaism and the interpretation of the Bible practised by the Scribes, became the most exclusive and sectarian of all religions.

All these developments had their roots in conditions at the



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time of Jesus. Thus these phenomena prove that the history of mankind had then reached the zenith of perplexity and helplessness. Great principles had been discovered which seemed to enable man to build up a new world; but they lacked coherence and, as a result of the application which had been made of them, history first came to a standstill, and then its wheel seemed to roll backwards. What enabled the ancient world to subsist for such a relatively long time after the symptoms of decay and disintegration had made their appearance, was not so much the inherent strength of its achievements but rather the ineradicable longing for that greater future for which it hoped. We cannot but marvel at the divine wisdom, when in reviewing ancient history we discover how God in His Providence chose the right moment for Incarnation.

### C. THE PLENITUDE OF CHRIST

Jesus Christ holds a unique position in the history of mankind. On the one hand, both His person and His work are of absolute novelty. Those who attempt to interpret His life and activity by the working of purely historical factors will necessarily miss the point of their significance. On the other hand, no human life was ever so closely connected with the whole trend of history as was His. He not only came in the fullness of time, He was also Himself the fulfillment of holy as well as of secular history. In Him the prophecies of the Old Testament found their actual fulfillment, or the conditions for this fulfillment were created by Him. Moreover, as the never-failing source of every good and perfect thing He satisfied the longing and striving of the ancient world. Finally, as a result of the sway which He holds over mankind and

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over the powers which previously have dominated this world, creation will be brought by Him to its consummation.

### *1. The Newness of Christ*

The fact that our Lord Jesus Christ had no earthly father but was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary is not merely a miracle which calls forth our awe and adoration but it is, above all, a divine deed by means of which an entirely new factor was introduced into history. By the Virgin Birth, Jesus Christ became directly operative in history without being subject to its basic forces.<sup>5</sup> Pauline and Johannine Christology, although not directly referring to this fact, confirm it implicitly. For when they speak of "the Word that became flesh" <sup>6</sup> or of "Jesus Christ, who, being in the form of God . . . was made in the likeness of men" <sup>7</sup> they do not think of a man who was proclaimed or regarded as the Son of God, and therefore would have been subject to the powers of history like any other man born of two human parents. On the other hand, it is the Virgin Birth which prevents us from thinking of the work of Christ in terms of a divine disturbance of history. While His divine nature raises Christ above the necessities of history, it is His human origin which induces Him to act within its framework. Hence His activity appears to us as an historical process, yet at the same

<sup>5</sup> Those who attempt to "explain" the Virgin Birth by pointing to the phenomenon of parthenogenesis in animal life deprive it of its meaning. For the emphasis of the Biblical narrative lies on the fact that the Word of God became flesh in Mary's womb, rather than upon the fact that a virgin gave birth to a child. The latter event, apart from the former, would be a marvel of nature, but have no religious significance.

<sup>6</sup> John I:14.

<sup>7</sup> Phil. II:5.



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time as an entirely new trend in history. This is to be seen in the fact that not only did he overcome the barrenness of Judaism but also effectively influenced the whole historical development of the ancient world. Moreover, His power of newness is so inexhaustible that in every new situation since that time it has proved to be an element of transformation and salvation.

The New Testament stresses the fact that with the coming of Jesus Christ something entirely new had happened, notwithstanding the fact that all things were made through the Logos<sup>8</sup> and that He had already come in various ways to the world<sup>9</sup> and particularly to His chosen people Israel.<sup>10</sup> Newness, new, to make new are words which belong to the characteristics of New Testament terminology. Newness, novelty, in this connection, does not merely connote things and events that differ from others or have not happened before. Nor is it merely a supplement to what had already existed. The newness of Christ is not the product of a process whose necessity was inherent in the past. It is rather an aspect of the creativeness of the Logos; but at the same time it denotes things and events which take place in, and for their existence depend on, the world of history. Yet not only could they not be brought about by the forces inherent in the Old Aeon, but they gave also a new lead to history.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> John I:3.

<sup>9</sup> John I:9.

<sup>10</sup> John I:11.

<sup>11</sup> Because of this novelty it is misleading to call Jesus Christ the "center of history." For this title, attributed to Jesus by Barth, Tillich and others, is incompatible with the Biblical view of history, which moves straight on from its beginning to its consummation. The concept of "center" presupposes a cyclic view of history which would transform the Jesus Christ of history into the immutable deity of New Platonism and similar systems.

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This element of novelty in Jesus Christ furnishes an explanation for the paradoxical rôle which humanity plays in history. Although in the becoming flesh of the eternal Logos mankind appears in its perfection, nevertheless history itself is not the mere self-development of mankind. Incarnation is an act by which the Logos interferes with history. John the Baptist marks, therefore, the dividing line between the two epochs of history—the Old and the New Aeon. Hence Christ's contribution to history has a double aspect: a positive one and a negative one. Negatively, His coming brings to an end the dominion of Satan. Christ's coming implied the fight against, and destruction of, the Satanic powers in this world. Christ came to this world as the Messianic king. Once He had announced the coming of His kingdom, the ancient world was no longer allowed to develop according to its prevailing tendencies. Wrede, A. Schweizer and other representatives of "consistent eschatology" have rightly noticed that, from the proclamation of the Kingdom onward, events developed according to an irresistible divine necessity. These theologians, however, overlooked the fact that this process led not only to the catastrophe at Calvary, but also, and above all, to the ruin of those who opposed the Anointed of God.

Thus Christ's appearance is not only directly responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews, but also for the collapse of ancient civilisation and of the Roman Empire. The pagan philosophers of the Christian era, as well as the Roman emperors, felt instinctively that the very presence of the Christian church called their own existence into question, because it acted on principles entirely incompatible with theirs.



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Yet, at the same time, the coming of our Lord made a positive contribution to history. New as His life and work were in every respect, they nevertheless fitted in perfectly with what the ancient world had been longing for and striving after but had never succeeded in attaining. He raised the dry bones of the ancient world to new life. His advent was not the mere promise of a new world to come. He actually transformed it. In many of His parables, Christ affirmed this fact: the divine seed had already been sown, the divine light kindled.

The creative and the destructive functions of Christ's activity must be seen as one. The new things which He brought were not a mere increase of the many achievements of mankind, as were those of so many other great men in history. As a result of His coming, all attainments and standards of the Old Aeon lost their meaning. He made all things new.

By the fact of Incarnation Christ was able to carry out two functions simultaneously. For by becoming flesh he acted upon man both with divine power and in virtue of His newness. Both qualities were required. The prophets of Israel—and to a lesser degree many sages in the Old Aeon—had enunciated new principles, but they had not thereby changed the nature and the structure of this world. And the same holds true for the historical forces at work. None of the great monarchs or generals of the past, however enormous their powers, none of the great social, cultural or religious movements of the past, however revolutionary and comprehensive, had been able to change the nature of this world. They transformed its appearance—sometimes considerably—but at bottom they left man and the world as they were.

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### *2. The Fulfillment of the Prophecies*

What Jesus brought to mankind was absolutely new, and yet he could rightly say of Himself that He did not come to destroy the Law and the prophets; He came not to destroy but to fulfill.<sup>12</sup> The Law and the Prophets, that is the Old Testament, pointed directly to Him Who was to be sent by God to fulfill them.

Mankind has no real prophecies outside the Old Testament, whereas the Old Testament, on the other hand, is full of them. Whenever God revealed His will to His chosen people under the Old Covenant, He always let them know that His purpose had not yet reached its goal, and that He had still greater gifts in store for them. On the other hand, the idea of a divine Covenant, which underlies the whole Old Testament revelation, excludes the assumption that in the successive acts of divine history the content or the meaning of Revelation had altered. God remained the same throughout the ages, and what he manifested was not changing decrees, but His one eternal purpose, that man should become His child. Yet His prophecies, on the other hand, also made clear two facts, (1) that mankind should develop in history from childhood to manhood, and so attain to a full understanding of His will, and (2) that the power of sin, by which men had been turned away from God and so prevented from attaining their divine destination, would be overcome.

(1) The first of these promises was fulfilled through Jesus by the truths that He brought home to His followers, for they were not merely some new truths, but rather the Truth itself.

<sup>12</sup> Matt. V:17.



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In Him personally, for the first time, mankind reached the age of manhood; it became fully aware of the meaning and the deepest implications of the will of God. This historical connection between the revelation of God under the Old Covenant and in Jesus is essential for an understanding of His life and message. Studied apart from it, they lose their specific meaning, because then Christ is placed on the same level as the other great men of history. This is the reason why the New Testament writers so frequently refer to the Old, and why a church which thinks that it can dispense with the Old Testament cuts away its own roots. The Old Testament, on the other hand, remains a Jewish book when interpreted apart from the light which the coming of Jesus Christ has thrown upon it. The historical development of Israel is relevant to us because it points to the establishment of God's Kingdom through Jesus. Isolated from Him it would be mere history without religious importance for us. Similarly, the Law of the Old Testament is rightly understood only by those who discover its spiritual meaning in Jesus Christ. Taken by itself, it is a collection of laws of the ancient Jews and no longer places us under obligation. But seen in connection with the divine economy, it pictures an ideal of life which was one day to be actualised by Christ, and through His power by His followers as well.

(2) Moreover, salvation came in Jesus' person to mankind. He was the new man, the Second Adam, free from the stains of sin; and through Him men obtained deliverance from sin's satanic power. Thus He became the fulfiller of the prophecies of the Old Testament, which foretold the pouring out of God's full blessing upon mankind.

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The attempt has been made, in modern theology, to distinguish in prophecy between promise and prediction, and to minimise the significance of prediction. But to separate the two elements is to do violence to prophecy. For even as God's covenant with Abraham or Moses, for instance, did not take place in a timeless, merely ideal realm of existence, so the prophecies must not be tied up with a timeless reality. The rejection of prediction cannot be based upon the fact that, in divine prescience, promise and its fulfillment are seen as one, because they, nevertheless, point to different moments in historical time. On the other hand, the predictions contained in the Old Testament prophecies, while frequently foretelling an imminent event in contemporary history, imply a deeper meaning as well, and it is that which makes them important for the understanding of Jesus Christ. As divine prophecies they are not mere oracles, such as the gentiles had, but revelations of the teleology of holy history. Thus the events in which they found their fulfillment in actual history, became thereby types and forebodings of the Messianic kingdom.<sup>13</sup> Thus the whole history of Israel is, in some respects, a type of the New Covenant. It must be admitted that the prophecies of the Old Testament cannot be regarded as a proof of the Messianic dignity of Christ if, by proof, we understand a demonstration, the cogency of which must be recognised by all. Even as a man who has not watched the development of the caterpillar into a

<sup>13</sup> This rule is equally true for the prophecies of the New Testament. The Book of Revelation, for example, can be interpreted both in an historical and an eschatological way. Many of the modern lovers of the book overlook, however, that the historical fulfillment of prophecies is not in itself their eschatological fulfillment. This may have preceded it, or else will follow it at the end of days.



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butterfly would refuse to believe that it was the same insect, so one who does not believe in Christ cannot understand that the prophecies of the Old Testament speak of His coming and Kingdom. If they are interpreted from the Jewish point of view, most of them have not yet been fulfilled, for what the Jews are waiting for has not yet come to pass. Whereas the Jews think the coming things of God have to be interpreted from the past, it is God's method in history to re-interpret the past by new events in history. Those, on the other hand, who demand that the Biblical prophecies should be interpreted "scientifically," that is to say, "from their historical situation," and that thereby abstraction should be made from the central rôle which Jesus Christ plays in history, are equally mistaken. For such interpretation would treat those prophecies as merely human opinions and divinations of the future, rather than as the Word of God spoken to and through the prophets.<sup>14</sup> The prophets themselves were not always fully aware of the meaning and implications of their prophetic utterances, manifested to God's chosen people through them under divine constraint.<sup>15</sup> For in history Christ alone is the genuine key to their true apprehension.

But we would entirely misunderstand the divine character of these prophecies if we thought that their fulfillment consisted in the mere taking place of an event which had been foretold. The fundamental difference between an oracle and these prophecies lies in the fact that the coming event which they foretell is not merely some contingent event in history, but rather the central event in and through which everything on

<sup>14</sup> See Pascal, *Pensées*, Section XI.

<sup>15</sup> Amos III:8.

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earth attains to completion. It is the event by which all the seemingly disconnected historical activities of the Logos are integrated into one historical process. While, under the Old Covenant, the Word of God came to man only incidentally, now "the fullness of the Godhead dwelleth in Jesus bodily."<sup>16</sup> He is the veritable man, the Second Adam,<sup>17</sup> and His believers are destined "to come to the stature of His fullness."<sup>18</sup> Moreover, while under the Old Covenant people received the divine graces only intermittently, they now "receive grace for grace out of His inexhaustible fullness."<sup>19</sup>

When the first disciples of Jesus studied the Old Testament in order to apprehend their Lord's mission, it must have been a great surprise to them to discover how the life of Jesus in every detail corresponded to what the Old Testament had foretold about the life and fate of the Messiah, and how Jesus had acted precisely as behooved the Messiah of God.<sup>20</sup> Those who take the trouble to study the Old Testament will easily discover how absurd is the contention of some writers that the Gospel has been composed merely upon the prophecies of the Old Testament without an historical basis. Why should the early Christians have picked out a certain number of prophecies only and thereby formed a picture of the Messiah which differed so fundamentally from that which their Jewish contemporaries derived from the Old Testament? Rather than strengthening their position, it would have weakened it.

But it cannot be argued that Jesus did not fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament, since modern scholarship has

<sup>16</sup> Col. II:9.

<sup>17</sup> Rom. V:12-15; I Cor. XV:45.

<sup>18</sup> Eph. IV:13.

<sup>19</sup> John I:16, see Eph. III:19.

<sup>20</sup> Luke XXIV:25-27.



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shown that the passages adduced by the New Testament writers originally had a different meaning. To this we can reply: It is only after an event has taken place that the exact meaning of a prophetic passage referring to it becomes obvious. Such a passage as Isaiah VIII:14, of which mention is made in Matthew I:23, is in itself so obscure and ambiguous that it cannot be regarded as having caused the narrative of Jesus' birth from the Virgin. But even if we conceded that certain passages quoted by the Evangelists did not refer directly to the Messiah, sufficient proof would remain from other prophecies of the Old Testament which have been fulfilled by Jesus. Thereby it is shown that He was the man through Whom God's purpose in history was executed. He made mankind what by the will of God it was destined to become—the family of God.

### *3. The Consummation of Creation*

We have already shown that the fullness of time was the moment when the inherent development of the ancient world had come to an end; Incarnation indicated the close of the Old Aeon. That epoch was characterised by the free agency of satanic powers, and its end was due to the fact that by Jesus Christ these powers were fettered. They are not yet annihilated, but it is now the Son of God who determines the course of history, no longer they.

This transempirical event finds its expression in history:

(a) In a conflict between Christ's work and secular history, by which those elements which are incompatible with the Kingdom of Christ are eliminated.

(b) In Christ's renewing the active elements of secular

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history, and thereby bringing about a synthesis between the seemingly antagonistic tendencies of this world.

(c) In the fact that the newness introduced by Christ points to the final consummation of history rather than to a perpetual process with ever-changing forms.

### *(a) Crisis*

The fact that holy history had a spiritual cause—the Incarnation—and could not, therefore, be explained merely by its historical antecedents, became plain from the passionate opposition which Jesus and His followers met from the prevailing historical movements of their time. Most people may not have been aware of the deeper reason which impelled them to such an attitude; when confronted with Christianity they felt, nevertheless, that no compromise was possible between their basic outlook and that of Christ and his followers. It is this conflict between secular and divine history, between Christ and the powers of the Old Aeon, which explains the seeming contradictions of the history of western mankind during the first centuries of our era.

The unwillingness of the Jews to accept Jesus as the fulfillment of their hopes was particularly marked. The Crucifixion of Christ and the persecution of the early church are eloquent proofs of their hate.<sup>21</sup> But the contact of early Christianity with Greek civilisation was also bound to lead to a conflict, first of all in the religious realm. We see in the New Testament how St. Paul, St. John, and other writers realised at that time

<sup>21</sup> It is rather surprising to me that many modern scholars make light of the testimonies of the New Testament concerning contemporary persecutions, and hold that the church of the first century lived in relative peace with its Jewish and pagan environment.



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the dangers of syncretism and gnosticism. They insisted energetically on the exclusiveness of Christ's work and pointed out that the salvation which everyone was called to receive through Him was independent of the degree of His knowledge. In the realm of philosophy the Apologists of the second century A.D. showed a certain willingness to recognise the value of the achievements of the great pagan masters by ascribing them to the operation of the divine Logos. But we must not overlook the fact that the Fathers deny flatly the originality and sufficiency of pagan wisdom. To them there was only one source of truth, namely Christ. Hellenism, on the other hand, felt instinctively that even by this friendly approach, it was threatened in its very existence, and hence Celsus and the host of pagan philosophers scorned and ridiculed this view, which in their eyes would deprive philosophy of its most essential element—the dogma of the self-sufficiency of human reason.

In the political realm, the early Christians were quite willing to forgive the Roman Empire for having crucified Jesus; and they took part in its life according to the advice of their Master.<sup>22</sup> But they did not shut their eyes to the fact that this state, which, as an institution, was good and divinely appointed, was bad and even devilish in the actual use which it made of its power. Hence the scornful picture of Rome as the Beast, and the Whore Babylon, in the Book of Revelation.

### *(b) The New Synthesis*

At first sight the impact which Christ and His followers made on the ancient world seemed to be altogether ruinous. Yet by resisting the powers of the Old Aeon, Jesus broke their

<sup>22</sup> Rom. XIII:1-7.

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dominion and thereby enabled the elements of this world to develop according to the divine plan of creation, and thus to attain their divinely appointed goal.

History would have been suspended and destroyed rather than brought forward to its appointed goal, had it not been for Christ's coming, in which the Old Aeon reached its fulfillment. This result was due to the fact that, as the eternal Word of God, He had been operative already in the Old Aeon. Hence it was that everything which Hellenistic civilisation, the Roman Empire and Judaism had aspired to but were unable to achieve, was accomplished through Jesus.

This renewing influence of Jesus can be seen both in the realm of thought and in the life of society.

### (1) *The Realm of Thought*

It is seldom realised to what extent the thoughts of mankind have been transformed by the coming of Christ. He brought a new conception of truth and a solution of the mystery of evil, and he opened a new way to moral goodness. None of those who are unwilling to accept His solution have ever been able to offer a more satisfactory solution.

*The nature of truth.* Jesus restated the problem of truth and thereby overcame the antagonism between subjectivism and dogmatism. Greek civilisation was based, as we have seen, on rationalistic humanism. Judaism, on the other hand, shared a profound distrust in the creativeness of the human mind. It regarded God's Revelation as the only source of truth. For fear of an erroneous appropriation of God's Word, it resorted to a theory of mechanical inspiration of the Old Testament, and attempted to gain knowledge of all truth contained therein



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by a literal interpretation of its text. Against these two extremes, Christ put the authority of His own person. Thereby He confirmed the Greek belief that man is the measure of all things, but He made clear at the same time that He alone was the veritable man.

At the same time, Jesus confirmed the Jewish belief that the only historical document in which truth concerning God could be found, was the Bible. To Jesus and His disciples the Bible was no longer a dead authority. It was in vain that His adversaries adduced the letter of the Torah against Him. He could give evidence that the Old Testament itself claimed to be interpreted as the revelation of the real living will of God. Thus by shifting the interest in the Bible from the form of its text to its primary argument—God's saving will—Jesus established a clear distinction between things, which pertain to salvation, and "natural" things.

Similarly, the nature of knowledge was transformed. Hellenistic philosophy had already realised that all thinking presupposed unquestionable knowledge of some objective truth as its basis. But as often as the philosopher tried to enumerate such truths, they failed. "Objective truth" seemed to be an elusive idea. In the Incarnation this situation was changed, for the Logos, through whom all things were made, became visible to man, and could therefore be apprehended in an unambiguous way. Thus it was possible to distinguish between changeable natural factors, on the one hand, and the underlying teleologic structure of the universe as rooted in the saving purpose of God, on the other. By the Incarnation, Christ has laid the foundation of a "Christian philosophy." This and not Aristotelian or Platonic philosophy, as Stephen

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Gilson and other Roman Catholic scholars would have us believe, is the true "philosophia perennis." We find it in Origen and Augustine, in Anselm and Abelard, in Saint Bernard and Gregory VII, Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventura, Thomas à Kempis, Luther, and Calvin, Joh Arndt, and Pascal. That is to say, the "Christian philosophy" shows far greater variety than one would guess from these Catholic scholars, and its continuity consists not so much in the use of special philosophical postulates as in the fact that in it Christ is regarded as the fountain of truth.

Christ has not abolished natural knowledge and secular philosophy, but these can no longer be regarded as independent realms of the human mind. They yield true knowledge only within the framework of Christian philosophy.

*The mystery of evil.* Moreover, Jesus Christ enabled mankind to solve the mystery of evil. Ancient mankind was bewildered by it, but could not find an adequate solution. The cause of evil was sought in the imperfection of this sublunary world, or in the envy of the gods, or in the activity of demons. But none of those explanations was fully satisfactory, and moreover the different attempts contradicted each other. Jesus, on the other hand, conceived His messiahship as a struggle between Himself and Satan. The existence of evils consequently was not to be ascribed to the imperfection of God's creation, but rather to the activity of created spiritual beings who, in this world, attempted to counteract and thwart the purpose of God. Suffering, consequently, could have quite different meanings: either divine punishment, when God left man to the evil powers, or vicarious service, when God used man for His purposes in His fight against the satanic



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powers. Moreover, by laying down His life for the redemption of mankind, Jesus manifested that evil, while inseparable from this empirical world, nevertheless did not belong to the divine plan of creation. It was not, therefore, to be regarded as something absolutely inevitable in which man had to acquiesce. On the other hand, Jesus' death was proof of the fact that mankind was unable by its own efforts to overcome evil.

Apart from Christ, mankind had attempted to fight evil by rational actions and social and political reforms (Plato, Aristotle: evil is due to the imperfections of this world), by magical and religious practices, rituals and exorcisms (against the evil powers), by fatalistic resignation to the will of the gods (Stoicism), or by trying to get as much pleasure as possible out of a foolish world (Cynicism, Epicureanism). It is obvious, since Christ came, that all these attempts can yield at the best only partial satisfaction. The only way of getting to the root of evil is to combat its author, and this can be done by Christ alone. Hence social and political reforms must be rooted in the life of faith. Mankind must learn that without Christ nothing effective can be done.

*The way to goodness.* Finally Christ brought home to mankind the true meaning of goodness. In His own person, by His example and His redemptive work, Jesus Christ conveyed to humanity a new and comprehensive conception of goodness. He did not come to dissolve the Law; yet He fulfilled it in a way which no one had ever before anticipated. His own life became a new law, disclosing the basic intention of the Torah. By the exemplary character of His life, He achieved more than any theoretical interpretation of the Law of God could possibly do, however sagacious and profound it might have been.

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His life was the event through which the holy will of God was actualised in mankind for the first time in history. In the Sermon on the Mount, and on other occasions, Christ expounded this will as underlying the Torah; but it was by His life and death, rather than by His teaching, that He influenced the trend of moral life in history. By insisting on the absolute obligation which the will of God carried with it, He justified, on the one hand, the moralism of both the Pharisees and the Greek philosophers and, on the other, the worship of political law in the Roman Empire; at the same time overthrowing their practical applications. He enabled men to live a higher life and to reconcile their conflicting ideals by accepting Him as the fulfillment of the will of God.

### (2) *Social Life*

In the same way as the presence of Christ transformed the prevailing ideas of His time, it altered the structure of social life.

*The values of civilisation.* Christ reversed the whole scale of empirical values and gave a new impulse to social life and civilisation. Since His coming no good was any longer good in itself, all things and events had to be measured by the significance which they had for His purpose in history. Yet the importance which He Himself ascribed to His person did not rest upon His personality but rather upon the fact that He was doing His Father's will. But, as has been shown, we cannot separate Him from this will because He is its divine actualisation. Being aware that everything in this world has been made by God and that nothing is evil in itself, Christ Himself did not retire from the world, nor did He advocate



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asceticism or monasticism. But He did not regard civilisation or moral perfection or political order as a supreme good. He showed that there was only one thing needed, namely life with the Father, and all other values were of secondary importance: necessary, but not sufficient in themselves. Thus believers possess all things, but they possess them in Christ; and the value of things depends, therefore, on the strategic position of the fight between Christ and the satanic powers. Hence an element of instability and uncertainty is introduced into the world as contradistinguished from the static and dogmatic conceptions of ancient religions and philosophies. But since the new principle of appraisal is based on Christ's triumphant fight against Satan, it acts as a constant stimulus and no longer allows mankind to acquiesce in any fixed type of political life or civilisation.

*The political order.* The influence that Jesus exercised upon political life was no less profound than His influence upon civilisation. It is no exaggeration to say that the idea of the Kingdom of God, as actualised in Jesus, created an entirely new idea of the state. First of all, it deeply affected the significance and the function of political order in this world. In the Old Aeon political order, even in its most perfect actualisation, was order established from outside the individual will, while civilisation was order from within. But in Christ's reign as Messianic King, a synthesis between internal and external life was established by God himself. Christ's Kingdom, like the state, imposes itself from outside. For it is God, not man, who establishes it. He makes us His captives. Yet it operates by means of a power which works within man. Christ affects and alters the hearts of His elect, so that they become willing

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to follow Him. They no longer need the pressure of political order to be restrained from wrongdoing. The love of Christ constrains them. Christ and His disciples, nevertheless, accepted the order of the state, for although they did not need it for themselves, they recognised that this institution was necessary for the good of their unbelieving fellowmen. Moreover, Jesus, following the Old Testament, made clear the function which political power performs in the purpose of God. He confirmed the instinctive belief of the ancient world that the existence of states and rulers rested upon a divine institution and could not be explained merely as the working of the gregarious instinct or the will for power. In order to maintain at least relative peace and justice among sinful men, God had delegated part of His power to the rulers and constituted men in such a way that they found themselves compelled by inherent necessity to live in political groups rather than in anarchy. But, on the other hand, Caesar's authority was derived from God's, hence there was no place for any deification of the Empire or of the political order. Moreover, since Christ Himself had been enthroned by God as the visible King of His Kingdom, the mere possibility of any kind of indirect worship of the state was excluded. It could not be argued that the state, acting vicariously for God on earth, had a claim upon man's absolute loyalty in all earthly things. For there was a divine will present among men, namely Jesus Christ, and His will was superior to that of any human group or institution. Hence it was made evident that it was God's will that the state should be a merely secular institution, and that this limitation must be accepted by the political authorities.

This divine purpose was manifested by the fact that Christ



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Himself instituted the church. Since it is based upon His will, no other human organisation has the right to care for the religious interest of men or to determine what men should do in reference to the will of God. Jesus' example created an entirely new office in His church. It united elements of the priest, the official and the teacher, but transcended them all by its constant, personal care for the spiritual well-being of the members of the congregation and by its missionary zeal. His disciples were entrusted by Him with this pastoral charge.

Christ conceived His life as a task in the service of men who needed salvation. He invited them to come to Him with their needs and sorrows and problems; He always had time for them and He showed a personal interest in each of them individually. He compared Himself to a shepherd who cared for his flock, sought what was lost and protected them from the wolf. We hardly realise today how strongly this new type of office has transformed the whole structure of social life, and how it has exercised its influence upon other types of service as well. It is enough to compare the modern conception of a teacher with that of antiquity.

### *(c) Pointing to the Final Consummation*

God, Who through His revelations had acted in sundry ways upon mankind, entered into its history in the Incarnation. History, however, would have come to an end if God had manifested Himself in His majesty. Yet in His condescension He stooped down to man, and thus the coming of the Messiah, while bringing to a close the Old Aeon, could start a new period of history as well. For as a human individual the Word of God could become a power operating in history. Yet Christ

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differed from all other human agents by the fact that in Him man's true nature was at last fully actualised, while up to His time all efforts of man had been but aspirations towards this goal. Hence it is obvious that history can never transcend Jesus Christ. Those who regard history as the manifestation of the various potentialities of man's nature are unaware of the significance of the Incarnation. By it a definite goal is appointed to historical development. Through union with Jesus all the elect are to become His equals. This goal, on the other hand, determines the future development of the human race. No ideal that falls short of equality with Jesus Christ can any longer satisfy mankind. Thus Christ was to prescribe to history its course of development, and thereby also the selection of the means required for attaining its goal. The process of history is the gradual manifestation of Christ's victory over the powers of darkness.

Thus the Incarnation gave men the assurance that their eschatological expectations were substantially true, because by the Incarnation they were directed to a definite goal to be reached in an historical process. It was the humble advent of the God-man that enabled men to carry on their political, cultural, and religious life. But these activities are now definitely subordinated to the Second Coming of the Lord. While thus, on the one hand, history is given a new impetus, on the other hand, it is now directly subject to the judgment of Christ.<sup>23</sup> Up to the days of Jesus, men had an excuse for many of their deeds because, while trying to do their best, they lived in darkness and ignorance. The situation has now changed completely, since in Jesus both God's and man's true

<sup>23</sup> John XV:22.



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natures have been disclosed. Those who openly reject Christ rebel henceforth against God and therefore have no hope that they themselves or their works will succeed.

### D. CONCLUSION

Against the interpretation of Christ's historical significance, as given above, one objection might be raised: is not this whole survey confined to the Mediterranean world and are not our inferences, therefore, inconclusive as soon as we speak of world history in its comprehensive sense? Our answer is this: "fullness of time" is a term which belongs to holy rather than to secular history. We have shown that it denotes a moment in the spiritual world—the time when the powers of darkness have become so influential that the existence of mankind, and therewith of this world, is at stake. But spiritual history does not manifest itself simultaneously in all realms and in all groups and peoples of earthly history. The development reached in the Mediterranean world was indicative, however, of a spiritual situation which would be reached by the rest of mankind sooner or later. Thus we can say: while in spiritual history the time was fulfilled at the moment of Christ's coming in the flesh, empirically—as the history of Christianity has shown—each nation did not reach the fullness of time at the same moment in the chronological scale. The index of its fullness is the fact that Jesus Christ confronts it. On the other hand, it can be shown that not only the history of the Mediterranean world, but the whole of history, had then virtually come to an end. For since the beginning of the Christian era no nation has been able to make a contribution to history that was not already explicitly or implicitly contained in the civilisation

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of the Mediterranean world. What apparently contradicts this statement is the fact that in some nations this barrenness has not yet produced a state of things as ominous as it threatened to be in the ancient world at Jesus' time. Yet as soon as Christ, by the preaching of His message, confronts such a nation, its development follows exactly the same law as in the ancient world—opposition, breakdown of its pagan civilisation, and re-integration of some of its elements into a new Christian history. The history of China, for example, under Christian influence, is a very remarkable instance of this law. Her old civilisation and political order have collapsed, all efforts to revive them have failed, and the only creative endeavors for a new civilisation on a national basis are due to Christian influence.

Thus in conclusion we may say: the fact that Jesus Christ came in the fullness of time means that He came at that decisive moment of history when the three great historic powers which were then in existence, had reached a stage of development in which they were incapable of bringing about anything new. Moreover, their synthesis, which was required in the interests of mankind, was precluded by their mutual antagonism. Hence the coming of Christ, Who introduced entirely new factors into history by His Incarnation and His message was the turning point of history. The prophecies of the Old Testament confirm the decisive character of His coming. He will bring history to its final end. There will be no new world period after that which He inaugurated.



## CHAPTER II

### THE DIVINE PURPOSE IN HISTORY

#### A. THE PROBLEM

FOR methodical reasons we have started our survey of history from an event within its course, rather than from its inception or from some facts previous to history—such as the divine purpose, for example. But if the church is true in its contention that Jesus Christ came in the fullness of time, His activity in history must be the legitimate and sufficient manifestation of the divine purpose in history, and by Him the obscurity of the past, as well as the seemingly confused history of our age and the secret of the ages to come, will be illuminated. Yet this result can be reached only if we hold with the universal church that Jesus Christ, in the fullness of His theandric nature, is our Lord and Saviour. The redemption of mankind is not to be ascribed to the eternal Logos in Heaven apart from His Incarnation (*Logos asarkos*), nor to the man Jesus as a member of the Jewish race. Only through the hypostatic union in the Virgin's womb did He become able to carry out His priestly work.<sup>1</sup> Important as are such occurrences in His life as the Virgin Birth, the death on the cross, or the Resurrection, none of these events in themselves, or even their

<sup>1</sup> Emil J. Scheller, *Das Priestertum Christi*. Paderborn, 1934.

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sum total, would have saving force but for the fact that they are elements of His indivisible life as the God-man.

The duration of His lifetime and every moment of it, in the order of historical succession, was therefore of significance for His redemptive work, each moment in its specific way, and at its proper time, so that the order of events could not be reversed, nor one of them be replaced by another. The babe in the cradle, for example, or the boy in Jerusalem could not perform the work which the man Jesus was called to do; and He had to wait for his public ministry until in baptism God had proclaimed Him publicly as His Son. Moreover, His work was a complete adjustment to historical conditions. Thus, when we say that Jesus Christ came in the "fullness of time" we do not mean by that on one special day in history. The "fullness" itself was an historical process which took a certain time to mature completely, even as a flower begins to unfold its petals at a certain definite moment of its growth, and yet requires some hours or even days to present its interior fully to the rays of the sun. Were it not that Jesus Christ's life had been lived in history and under historical conditions, it would not be possible for us to make it the starting point for our interpretation of history.

From the historical character of Christ's work we learn two facts concerning the nature of history: that there is a divine purpose underlying its ups and downs, and that the original structure of human life is perverted to such an extent that only by divine interference can history be rendered meaningful. These two facts are closely connected, and it is only with the right insight into their complex nature that we are capable of understanding what God is aiming at in history.



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### B. THE CORRUPTNESS OF THE HISTORICAL WORLD

#### 1. *Original Goodness*

Those who have attempted to interpret history apart from the Revelation brought by Jesus Christ are divided among themselves into two large groups. One of them interprets history as a process which moves towards increasing perfection, when progress seems to be inevitable; the other group holds that history is devoid of meaning and entirely chaotic, or tends towards complete degeneration and disintegration. Both groups adduce numerous instances which seem to prove the truth of their theses. Yet, closer examination, aided by the light of Revelation, shows that for the purpose of these rival interpretations those facts only have been selected which seem to corroborate each of them; and the rest have been ignored.

The fact that Jesus Christ had to come to establish His Kingdom in a world which had been created by Himself, points to the complex character of historical life. Because it has been created by God, this world is good; but its original goodness no longer appears directly in the events which take place on earth. We may compare it to some of the unfortunate victims of the last war, the men who have lost their limbs or their faces and now look like weird ghosts. Their aspect is so hideous that they are placed in special homes and hidden from the sight of the public. Yet, these men are human beings, nevertheless, and act as such. Similarly man is, and yet is not, what he has been; but we can construct his original perfection despite the disfiguration which Satan and his allied powers have brought upon him. Those who deny the original goodness of man and teach that he travels gradually from initial imperfection

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towards goodness and perfection, thereby make Christ's work superfluous. Why should it have been necessary for the Son of God to die for us if human nature could develop by itself towards its goal? Those, on the other hand, who hold that this goodness has been completely destroyed, are inconsistent if they believe in the Incarnation of our Lord. For unless some original goodness had been left in human nature, the Son of God would not have been able to become truly man. The New Testament, therefore, describes Satan's activity as resulting in the bondage of the world and of man, rather than in ontological badness.<sup>2</sup> Man's goodness, although still in existence, cannot develop towards the end for which he has been created.

### *2. Satanic Perversion of This World*

No life and no history would be possible in this world but for the original goodness still inherent in every creature and in every event. This assertion appears to be altogether gratuitous, for life and history as a whole do not seem to give evidence of this goodness; on the contrary, they present many pathetic features. Yet the cause of this is not to be sought in the imperfection of the divine act of creation but rather in the dominion which Satan wields over the creatures of this world. Nothing in this world is evil by nature, but the nature of everything can be, and frequently is, perverted. Individual differences, for example, become a cause of suspicion and estrangement; as a result of its plasticity ugliness and monstrosity may disfigure the shape of human creatures; or the dual structure of reality may lead to antagonism.

The hierarchical order also frequently breaks down, and

<sup>2</sup> Rom. VIII: 21f.



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thus means become ends, or what should be an end in itself (for example, human personality) is degraded to a means. Man, for example, becomes but a factor in the economic or military machinery which is set up to foster or to defend the interests of the ruling group in a country. Similarly nature, which is destined to be subservient to man, shows considerable reluctance to serve as, for example, in the continual deterioration of our technical products under the influence of natural factors, corrosion, loss of elasticity, chemical decomposition, for example. Moreover, machines, which were invented to make life easier and happier, exact a higher toll in crippled and dead than any war has ever done. Our factories, mines, and roads are battlefields and slaughter-houses. Furthermore, technical processes acquire dimensions which make it impossible for individual men longer to control them. The art of printing, for example, was meant to make the wisdom of mankind accessible to everybody; but the quantity of books, pamphlets, and newspapers which are published in one day is so considerable that it would probably take a man the whole twenty-four hours to read their titles alone. How, then, shall he be able to make an appropriate choice among them?

Moreover, man not infrequently keeps away from others and refrains from their company, although the goodness of this world can be enjoyed only to the extent that it is mutually shared. Similarly the fact that man has an individual mind makes him think that he is a self-contained entity, and thus leads to subjectivism. In collective life the same attitude results in the belief in national self-sufficiency. Through the element of continuity, which in the time-process is the cause of its preservation, the past gradually becomes a burden to man-

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kind. Men now live to preserve their traditions rather than to live their own lives; but when in revolutions they break with their past, the result is loss of the benefits of the past. Revolutions may increase the freedom of a nation or a class, but at the same time they render mankind historically poorer. Furthermore, the teleological character of the time-process finds itself thwarted by catastrophes, which prevent a gradual development of the human race. Moreover, because of the fact that all creatures are doomed to death, the historical life of man must start anew again and again. It suffices to realise what great efforts were made to bring into existence the great empires of antiquity, and how little of their political and cultural achievements has survived in the history of mankind.

Our survey has shown that in history two opposite processes are going on. There is, on the one hand, the inherent dynamic of the objective values which underlie historical life, and which under divine guidance man becomes aware of in history. On the other hand, we notice the deterioration of the benefits brought about in history and the collapse of the existing historical units. The co-existence of these two tendencies forms the basic problem of a theology of history. Modern man, having lost his sense of the reality of the spiritual world, tries to solve the problem in a monistic way. But this cannot be done consistently. If nature is regarded as the agent of history, the problem remains why nature constantly disavows its own activities by destroying the achievements of the past. If the agency of history is sought in man alone, how can we explain the inner contradictions of his activity? Why is it that at one time he makes such great efforts to build up a civilisation, and yet at other times makes equally great efforts to destroy it by



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wars? Or that by his scientific research he acknowledges the value of objective truth, and, nevertheless, uses scientific methods to prevent and suppress truth? Or that he strives after freedom, and at the same time uses his own freedom to oppress other people? Or finally, that he aims at a perfect goal of history, and yet proves to be absolutely ignorant of its nature? So that by such high ideals as an empire, a classless society, or a League of Nations, for example, he becomes even more entangled in the perplexities of historical life.

The only satisfactory solution which we can offer is the Biblical one. History rests upon a revelation of God which takes place in a hostile medium. Man, who was created good, has lost his freedom. He is now under the power of Satan, who no longer allows him to make the right use of his goodness. Moreover, he has been ejected from the spiritual world and must live in a world which is dominated by the powers of evil. Although General Revelation tells him which values are good, he cannot actualise them perfectly in this earthly world, and moreover, instead of making the best possible use of the benefits which he creates, he is tempted by Satan to utilise them to the detriment of his fellowmen.

In such circumstances it is not surprising that men are never really satisfied with history. History is an attempt to build a perfect world with materials and methods which are not fit for this purpose. Hence, it is absurd to expect satisfactory results from an intensification of man's efforts, by revolutions, mass organisations and other gigantic projects.

### 3. *God's Grace*

It would be wrong, however, to infer from this perversion

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of the world and of history that the world's progress is continually downwards. Although the dominion which the Devil holds over the inhabitants of the earth, precludes any kind of easy optimism, neither is there reason for pessimism. For, powerful as is the "Prince of Darkness," he can never increase his might beyond the measure that is granted to him by God. Thus we find that there is a basic law of history, according to which the balance between good and evil in this world remains constant. Every tool, for example, that serves the good of mankind, can also be used as a weapon; the same technical process turns out agricultural machines and tanks for warfare, or fertilizer and gunpowder, for example.

Man by himself cannot check the Satanic power in this world. Were it not that God by His "common grace" had interfered again and again in history and thus strengthened the powers of goodness, mankind would have succumbed to its eternal foe. The hopeless situation which man had reached in the days of Christ proved that in the long run even this gracious intervention of the common grace would have been insufficient but for the personal interference of the Son of God. Hence it is that the "fullness of time" was not the moment when man had reached supreme perfection, but rather the time when divine help was supremely needed. Thus, this short survey of the corruptness of history has prepared the way for our understanding of God's purpose in history.

### C. THE PLAN OF SALVATION

In the spiritual life of western Christianity, since the fourteenth century, increasing stress has been laid upon the personal relationship between the individual and God. This



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process, important as it has been for the full understanding of the Gospel message, has nevertheless frequently resulted in a one-sided, man-centered conception of religion. But the New Testament makes it plain that the work of our Lord has a cosmic aspect as well. While it is true that Jesus came to save mankind, human redemption was a phase rather than the ultimate goal of His activity. God's purpose in history is the manifestation of His glory as the Lord, and this purpose is carried out by the establishment of His Kingdom on earth. The means by which God achieves this end are the life and death of Jesus Christ, and God's glory is therefore primarily the glory of Christ's Cross. Thereby the Christian view of God's glory differs widely from that held by the Jews and by the theistic philosophers. God proves Himself to be the Lord of the Universe by sending His Son for the redemption of a helpless mankind. It was not the historical development of humanity, nor God's prophetic revelations under the Old Covenant, which brought about the complete change in the conditions of the human race, but God's dealing with men in Jesus Christ. His Incarnation took place at a certain moment of history. Thus all forms of theism in which God is conceived as having no contact with history thereby "empty the Cross of Christ."

On the other hand, the historical character of the Incarnation precludes a static conception of the purpose of God. He is not a God who once made this world and then left it to itself. He is a God Who "worketh." When He created the world He could rightly say that it was good and complete, but it was not thereby doomed to stagnation. Its goodness consisted, on the contrary, in the fact that it had a future ahead, a

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goal towards which to move. God's purpose in creation was to make a universe which would develop its potentialities in such a way that He might rejoice in it, and which would finally reach such perfect realisation of these potentialities that it would be fitting for God to dwell among man. That is to say: the idea of Incarnation was a constitutive element of the divine purpose of creation. This design involved from the very beginning the central rôle of man in God's world. Thus, the very purpose of creation has as its center, history—that is, the development of man. The fact that we had to describe Jesus' work as taking place in the fullness of time, manifested this providential function of history. If we believe in Jesus Christ, we must reject not only the idea that the world was created to be independent of God and to develop on its own lines (Deism), but also the idea that man by his own efforts, or by a necessity inherent in history, would be able gradually to approach divine perfection. (Plotinus, modern evolutionism.) Man and the world were created in such a way that they could and should be in contact with God and thus enjoy such blessings as would increase their natural perfections.

By the rebellion of the Angel of Light, and by the Fall of Man who yielded to Satan's temptation, the whole world-process was deeply affected. These fatal events, although not compelling God to give up His original purpose and to replace it by a new one, nevertheless necessitated a considerable change in its execution. God did not destroy His world nor give up His determination to manifest His glory in it. But it was no longer a world in which He could rejoice. The Incarnation, which was meant to be the crowning event of human history, had thus to become the means of the redemption of man from



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the powers of sin and Satan. For these prevented mankind from living a true life and enjoying divine blessings.

Unlike many of the dispensations of common grace, the Cross of Christ was not merely a means of keeping history going for another century or so. It was a new start in history, as we have shown. For, by His sinless life and voluntary death Christ overcame Satan and his allied powers. Thereby the balance of power in this world was fundamentally changed. In a world where everything seemed to thwart the purpose of God, Christ established His Kingdom. Thus the further trend of history became subservient to His Will. Yet the period in which we now live (the New Aeon) is not in itself the goal of God's purpose. Although the Incarnation had an everlasting result, it had a provisional character as an event in time. The risen Lord did not stay forever with His church on earth. While it was God's will to dwell bodily on this earth, when it should have reached full maturity, the desperate state of mankind had moved Christ to come previous to the consummation of creation. This explains the paradoxical character of the New Aeon: although Christ is the dominating factor in its history, we are still waiting for the day of His return to this earth, for the moment when history will attain to its appointed end. Then only, when everything is under His feet, will the glory of God shine throughout His whole creation.

By stressing the glory of God which is to be manifested in history, the Christian view of history is fundamentally at variance with the modern philosophical and pseudo-religious views which all hold or imply that history serves the glory of man. We do not deny the value of the great and admirable achievements which mankind has made in the course of the

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millenniums. But we also see how human progress has been marred by unbelief, foolishness, crimes and vices, and above all we agree that the very possibility of man's development and the opportunities which nature has provided for such development, are the work of God, not of man. Christianity confirms the instinctive belief of mankind that man plays a decisive rôle in God's universe; but a man who has to be redeemed by God has no reason to boast. It is his own fault that man is mean and puny in God's good creation, and it is God's love alone that saves him from perdition. In a fallen world God must establish His dominion over all the powers of this world before He can make it His dwelling place.

This view of history does not imply that man is merely a passive object of God's operation in history. Through the Cross, Christ made Himself one with us and thus enabled us to be united with Him. Moreover, His mission was not the atoning work of the Cross alone, but also the proclamation of the will of God. From His teaching and preaching, it becomes clear that man is called to be an active agent in history. It is the will of the heavenly Father that all men should know Him and become cognisant of His will. His Special Revelation is, therefore, not merely a good gift; it is a necessary factor in the execution of His purpose. Thereby man shall be enabled to contribute to the glory of God by conforming his life to his Creator's will, and by praising His redeeming love. No higher goal can he reach, no nobler end aim at, than to become conscious of his function in the plans of God. For then the image of God will be restored in him. By the assistance of Christ he will then do what God Himself is doing.



### CHAPTER III

## GOD'S WAY THROUGH HISTORY

### A. THE SUPRA-HISTORICAL AND THE HISTORICAL

IN PROTESTANTISM, the theological discussion of history was from the very outset handicapped by the influence which nominalistic philosophy had on the reformers, and by the necessary but one-sided insistence on justification by faith, that is the manward aspect of the work of Jesus Christ. The basic axiom of nominalism is the belief that only individual facts and beings are real. Genus and species are regarded as merely logical classifications of individual beings. Whereas in the reformers themselves these factors were still sufficiently counterbalanced by the theological realism inherent in the traditions of the early and the mediaeval church, Protestantism in its classical developments of the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries was severed entirely from its roots. Thus epistemological realism was completely replaced by nominalism or its modern substitutes, such as the philosophical systems of Descartes, Locke and Kant. Jonathan Edwards struggled in vain against its tyranny. Moreover, the anthropological or soteriological interest prevailed so entirely over the cosmological or ontological that even Hegel's genial view of the world and history was not strong enough to alter the general outlook.

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Ultimate reality in this great philosopher's system was but another name for man conceived of in terms of infinity.

But as a careful study of the writings of the reformers will show, there is no reason why Protestant faith should be expressed by means of a nominalistic, rather than a realistic, philosophy. From the Protestant point of view metaphysical tenets are to be measured by the degree in which they do justice to the belief in the existence of the triune God and His work in creation and redemption; and epistemological systems are to be evaluated by their capacity to recognise God's revelation as a necessary factor in the process of knowledge.

Whereas Protestant theology stuck tenaciously to the nominalistic views, scientific thought since the seventeenth century gradually developed a new realism; yet since it lacked guidance by theologians, it quickly degenerated into the divers varieties of materialistic or biologic realism, all of which rejected the belief in the existence of any kind of supranatural reality. Protestant theology was incapable of coping with this new movement, because there was no bridge from the anthropocentric view of its nominalistic philosophy to the cosmic view of the modern scientist. The result has been not only, as we all know, the constantly widening cleavage between natural science and theology, which cannot be bridged by any method of apologetics, but also—a fact that is seldom noticed—an increasing impoverishment of theology. In order not to offer too many points of attack to critical philosophers, the concepts of Satan and of angels were entirely dropped or given an insignificant place in the theological systems.

Modern theology has made some attempts to remedy the situation in the field of history by making a distinction be-



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tween the supra-historical (*Uebergeschichtliches*) and the historical. I do not think that these attempts, which go back to Kierkegaard, Bachofen and Overbeck, are satisfactory in every respect. They are still clinging to the ideas of Hegelianism or Romanticism, rather than boldly adopting the New Testament view. Yet they point at least to the direction in which the solution is to be sought.

The creatures of this earthly, material world are not the only ones which God has made, and the state of existence in which we live is not the only possible one. Every page of the New Testament convinces us that this earthly, visible and tangible world is, as it were, encompassed by a spiritual world, no less real than stones and plants and beasts and men, wind and air and clouds and all the stars of the sky, but intangible and invisible. There is practically no phenomenon in this world which can be explained satisfactorily without the assumption that such a spiritual world exists. What we call the Ego or the soul, for example, belongs to that world, for it is a power which determines the direction and achievements of the individual, but cannot be identified with any part of the body or the whole body. But what we call the "nature of things" is also a spiritual nature. The fact that the seed of a plant always grows into a specimen of the same species may depend on the chromosomes; but that the chromosomes possess such properties is not due to their chemical composition but to the "generic power" which regulates the life of all individuals of a species. But unless we assume that this "generic power" subsists in a spiritual world, we have only a word without a meaning. The metaphysical weakness of modern science is the direct outcome of its lack of higher realism.

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There are different spheres of the spiritual world, and in this volume we are concerned with the superior ones alone. We cannot understand Christ when we see Him merely as a single individual of the Jewish race. He is the Son of God, operative in a human life. His historical activity was not mere appearance; but when, on the other hand, he said that His disciples should see the heavens open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man,<sup>1</sup> He did not think of merely subjective visions; He knew that man lived in contact with the spiritual world of heaven, although he might not be aware of it. And what holds true of man in general is particularly true with regard to the Son of Man. Thus even in this life a man lives in hell or in heaven, and spiritual powers harm him or damage him.

We have already hinted at the fact that the spiritual world, while existing in time, is not subject to the laws of historical time. Although we must not imagine, as Berdyaev does, that this world simply mirrors the spiritual world, it is true that the development of this earthly world depends entirely on the balance of powers in the spiritual world. Moreover, we have to distinguish between the uncreated inner life of the Godhead, on the one hand, and life in the spiritual world, which is created, on the other. Life within God is timeless; it has no prior and posterior; in the spiritual world there is beginning and end and succession of moments of time. This explains the fact that God eternally wills a world which shall manifest His glory, and that nevertheless Satan could rebel against His maker at a certain moment of time and was overcome by Jesus Christ at another time. It is because of the reality of this

<sup>1</sup> John 1:51.



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spiritual world that we can firmly hold that the Devil, Death and Sin have been vanquished not only in their individual assaults upon Jesus Christ, but in their spiritual existence as such. Were it not so, the Saviour's work would be of no avail to us in our own lives.

When we thus emphasise the significance of the spiritual world, we do not derogate from the value of history. Christ had to come to this earth because the foe which besets God's creatures operates on earth. But we shall not be able to combat the modernistic misinterpretations of Christ successfully if we do not admit that what our Lord did on earth was done in virtue of the fact that His life extended into the spiritual sphere. Moreover, we cannot understand the mystery of the Incarnation if we indulge in the lower realism adopted by so many would-be orthodox theologians. If in the Incarnation the Son of Man had assumed only a human body (including a soul), His work could not have applied to us; for the properties of the body cannot be communicated. Therefore, the church teaches rightly that He assumed full human nature. Why must one not adduce from this fact the indiscriminating redemption of all human beings, as was held by some early Fathers? The reason is that "human nature" does not belong to the empirical world; although it is real and operative in every human individual, it is spiritual in essence. Thus the Incarnation shows what the relationship is between the spiritual and the earthly world: what is real in the spiritual sphere can become actual on earth; but it is a possibility merely, and its actualisation may have quite different degrees of perfection, or the opportunity for it may be entirely missed by the empirical individual. The individualisation of the spiritual

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powers is therefore a necessary process; and yet earthly individuals are not merely a reflection of them. Hence nominalism was right as opposed to a realism which denied the metaphysical reality of the individual and treated it merely as a manifestation of the species. But nominalism was incomplete because it denied the reality of the spiritual world altogether, instead of setting out to discover the true relationship between the two realms.

### B. ORIGINAL HISTORY (URGESCHICHTE) AND PREHISTORY

A further, very important, element which we have to introduce into our concept of history is the distinction between the original history (*Urgeschichte*) of mankind, on the one hand, and pre-history on the other. The fact that the Biblical record of the early history of mankind seems to pass without a pause from the creation of heaven and earth to the lives of the patriarchs, has had preposterous effects on a theology which had lost the understanding of the higher realism of the Bible. Israel, Jesus and the New Testament writers knew better how to distinguish between the different periods of history.

It is not for reasons of apologetics that we hold that the events narrated in Genesis I:1 to III:23 belong entirely to the spiritual world; it is because thus alone are we capable of making right use of the New Testament eschatology. If the man whose creation is described in Genesis I and II is identical with some primitive man, and if the Garden, in which God had placed him, were some spot on this earth, then man's redemption would consist in a change of his mental or physical conditions, rather than in a deliverance of his metaphysical nature, and the new creation, as described in the last chapters of the



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Book of Revelation, would then take place in the spheres of geology and biology merely. Thus if we were consistent we would obtain an eschatology very much the same as that of Islam. But the fact that it is stated that God placed Cherubim at the east of the Garden of Eden and a flaming sword which turned every way,<sup>2</sup> justifies the exegesis of those church fathers who held that the fall of man was from a spiritual world into this earthly world. Although this earth is formed after the pattern of the spiritual world, it lacks its perfections. Potentially everything that characterises its prototype is contained in this world, but, as we have seen, it is fettered by Satan and thus is incapable of fully actualising its inherent goodness.

When we say that the fall of Adam took place in the spiritual, rather than in the earthly, world, we do not thereby doubt its reality. We believe, on the contrary, that we thus give a plausible and consistent explanation of the fact, taught by the New Testament, that Adam's sin is our sin and the sin of every individual. He is the prototype whose nature determines our own being and actions. If Adam had been merely our biological ancestor, the first man living here on earth, his guilt could not be transmitted to his progeny. On the other hand, sin would then be a natural weakness, not guilt; and thus those people who blame God for imputing Adam's sin to us would be right.

History in the proper sense of the word does not take place in the spiritual realm but is confined to the conditions of earthly life. The Biblical narrative of the beginnings of humanity justifies the distinction, which modern historians establish, between pre-history and history. It is not possible

<sup>2</sup> Gen. III:24.

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with absolute certainty to fix the moment when pre-history came to a close and history began. Some scholars are inclined to see in the invention of writing the beginning of truly historical life; others regard city life as its starting point. But quite apart from the fact that it is difficult to ascertain the date of either of these events, they are not necessarily connected with historical life. We suggest that pre-history be considered as the period of which the results only are remembered and whose events are transmitted to posterity merely because they have led to, or explain, results worth remembering. History would then comprise that part of the past of which events, as such, are remembered.

But the majority of modern historians make light of the oral traditions of primitive mankind and reconstruct pre-history mainly by means of the material remains which the archaeologist's spade unearths in constantly growing quantities. But by this method the historian does not obtain knowledge of the origins of history, he only learns what was in existence prior to history. His method is due to the distrust in which he holds the early oral traditions of mankind which, it is true, differ fundamentally from historical records.

Old Testament scholars have recognised for a long time that the narratives and genealogies given in the first chapter of Genesis are not on the same level as historical records, because they are told in a different language. They represent the earliest tradition of mankind and give expression to the way in which man in the earliest state of his existence on this earth used to remember the pre-history of the human race. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which were so entirely under the sway of positivism and kindred philosophies, tried



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to dismiss these stories as fabulous imageries. It was in vain that conservative theologians strove to maintain their authenticity, for these scholars showed so little understanding of the symbolic thinking and the spiritual world-view which underlie these narratives that they interpreted them as historical records. The fact should no longer be denied that, in the first chapters of the Bible, human pre-history is narrated in mythical language. Theologians are commonly afraid of using the term "myth" because rationalistic philosophy has associated it with mere imagination and falsehood. But this is not its true meaning. A myth is a story by which events in the spiritual world are described in terms of earthly occurrences, or earthly events are shown in relation to their spiritual roots.

The traditions contained in Genesis III–XI are the Hebrew form of the common heritage of mankind and they have obviously been formulated at a time when it was still natural to man to think of his life and of this world as being in close connection with the spiritual world.

This outlook misled primitive people, who had no connection with Biblical religion, either to an identification of the earthly with the spiritual world (animism) and thereby to the worship of earthly beings, or to a deification of the spiritual beings. But the mythical view is not in itself mistaken for that reason. It is based upon facts, and by further revelations it has been corroborated rather than weakened. The myth is the genuine form of revelation. In the course of history mankind has established a distinction between the natural and the supernatural or spiritual realm of reality. But useful as this distinction is for practical purposes, it has no place in the religious realm.

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It is therefore not surprising that nowhere in the Bible, down to the last page of the New Testament, do we find the modern separation of the spiritual from the earthly realm. We see, on the contrary, that the idea of spiritual beings, mediating the will of God (Wisdom, Glory, Might of God, angels, for instance) or counteracting it (Satan, devils, demons, principalities and powers, for instance) play an increasingly larger part in the revelation of the mystery of salvation.

It is not possible, however, to establish harmony between the records of Genesis III–XI on the one hand, and pre-historical discoveries on the other, unless it is fully recognised that history, as recorded in the Bible, because of its connection with the spiritual world differs fundamentally from the kind of history related by secular historians. The purpose for which the mystery of God has been revealed to mankind, and by inspired men transmitted to the church, was not to furnish material for secular historians, but rather to reveal the secret of the spiritual history of mankind. The first chapters of Genesis depict the original history of mankind as distinct from the pre-historical developments of civilisation. There can, therefore, never be a real conflict between the theologian and the historian as long as it is recognised that the events related in the Bible are but the earthly reflection of that spiritual history. Scholars may point to historical details which were unknown to the writers of the Bible and have been elucidated by recent discoveries, but they will never thereby refute the Bible.

### C. GENERAL REVELATION

In the first chapters of Genesis a summary is given of the origins of human civilisation. The primitiveness of man's



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beginning is not denied, but at the same time the fact is emphasised that man was aware of the fundamental difference which existed between himself and the brutes. For he knew he was connected with the spiritual world. The characteristic differences between man and the animals are not, therefore, primarily material ones of appearance, shape and physiological constitution; but these point rather to the specific values which are embodied in human nature and life.

The origin of civilisation cannot be explained as the natural outcome of man's empirical faculties. Why do all men instinctively feel that by making use of those specifically human values which history offers them their lives are lifted up into a supra-empirical realm? The only satisfactory explanation for the universality of this aspiration is to be found in the assumption that mankind originated from the spiritual world. In Paradise the ancestor of mankind must have received knowledge of the divine purpose of creation, which included knowledge of man's central rôle and destination, of the objective value of all things, and of the right use to be made of them. By communicating his spiritual nature to all members of the human race the first man made them partakers of this "General Revelation." It was by the grace of God that Adam was appointed head of the earthly creatures, and it is by our union with him that this "common grace" enables men to strive after the preservation of the historical values.

Proof of a general revelation underlying human history is to be found above all in the fact that man has language. For language is primarily the means by which man responds to the divine revelation. For the satisfaction of his physical needs language would not have been required; like animals

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he might have communicated for this purpose by means of inarticulate sounds and gestures. Words enable man to give expression to his experience of values and so to have fellowship in these values. The fact that the giving of names to all creatures is reported <sup>3</sup> as having taken place in the Garden of Eden, points to the true nature of language. Its primary function is to find words which give adequate expression to the spiritual value of things. Genuine names are not mere counters for practical purposes, but manifestations of the secret properties of a being. Hence resulted the importance of the knowledge of names in early religions. Originally language itself was probably of nominal rather than of verbal character. A name had the function of a demonstrative value-judgment, for example: "In his day Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is the name whereby he shall be called, The Lord Our Righteousness." <sup>4</sup>

All forms of social life are therefore based upon language. The only species of historical life that is speechless is art; but art is not the residue of the pre-linguistic stage of man—which never existed, because it was speech that first made man human—it is rather an attempt to give expression to that which is beyond speech. Yet even in this respect man realises that he cannot do without language. Only in so far as language expresses the unspeakable values of history can these values fully manifest their transcendence. Poetry rather than sculpture, painting, architecture or mimic art is therefore the paramount type of art and thus it has become the mode of purest expression in religion.

Yet by far the strongest proof of general revelation is the

<sup>3</sup> Gen. II:19-20.

<sup>4</sup> Jer. XXIII:6.



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phenomenon of religion. Its enemies have made vain attempts to explain it away. Feuerbach assumed that religion was but the projection of man's hopes and fears into a transcendent realm. But while we do not deny that hope and fear play a large rôle in the upbuilding of religion and have helped to shape the actual conceptions formed of gods and spiritual beings, still we contend that man would never have formed the idea of a transcendent reality were it not that this idea had previously impressed itself upon his mind. Descartes in his "ontological" proof of the existence of God has made this point sufficiently clear. Yet it would be inaccurate to speak of general revelation as taking place in pre-history and history, if we only meant thereby that mankind became aware of the objective values underlying social life. It would then be more exact to speak of man's discovering an ideal realm of values which, together with material things, constituted this universe. The fact that characterises these values beyond their objectivity is the claim which they make upon man's will. One cannot acknowledge the validity of such a value without at the same time recognising that its existence is necessary for this world, and that man must work for its preservation and cultivation. This demand is felt particularly strongly in political and moral life, philosophy and art. The cause of this authoritative claim is the origin of these values in the will of God. Hence people instinctively relate them to religion. Thereby they express their conviction that man—individually or collectively—has no right to question their validity or to alter their application, except by direct divine command.

Moreover, by connecting social life with religion men recognise the power of the godhead. From such an association the

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order of social life receives a sanction much more powerful than men could ever give it. Men are afraid lest they should incur the vengeance of the deity when transgressing the laws and customs of their group.

A further proof for the working of general revelation and common grace in the history of mankind is to be seen in the fact that all social groups manifest a tendency both to improve their actual forms of organisation and to attain to an insight into their underlying values clearer and more comprehensive than they had in former times. Such developments cannot be explained as the result of hazard or the effect of instinctive action. On the other hand, how should human reason be able to improve its knowledge of these values unless they were first given to it? Experience would manifest the shortcomings only of actual practice, but would not by itself lead to real progress.

### D. HOLY AND SECULAR HISTORY

#### 1. *The Problem*

We have described the beginnings of history as the result of general revelation to mankind. Yet we have to bear in mind that this is but one aspect of the process. The fact that in the "fullness of time" different historical tendencies converged and that the teleological character of this process was emphasised by the Incarnation, points to a divine agency in history. Revelation would lack real meaning if it were the manifestation of divine mysteries, the apprehension of which was left entirely to the contingencies and hazards of historical life. It was this divine agency which our fathers had in mind when they spoke of "common grace." The life of Jesus manifests



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the fact, moreover, that the historical process previous to His coming developed along two different lines: secular history and holy history. Of holy history we know primarily through the Bible, but it is not confined to the events recorded there; it has its continuation in church history. But it is not to be identified with the history of Jewish-Christian religion as distinct from political or cultural history; it is rather that trend of history in which the Holy Spirit of God takes a direct part. Yet this definition does not imply that secular history is history without God. God is at work everywhere in history. But while in secular history Satanic interference is more conspicuous than divine guidance, in holy history, conversely, the divine agency is made particularly manifest by the illumination of God's messengers and by miraculous occurrences. These divine manifestations constitute special revelation.

The distinction between general and special revelations, and between secular and holy history, does not detract from the sovereignty and unique agency of God in history. It only takes into consideration the fact that this agency differentiated itself at a certain moment of the time-process. Apart from God, history would be but the struggle for self-preservation of an infinite life impulse, as held, for example, by Hegel, Nietzsche, and the Evolutionists, or it would be altogether holy (as Bossuet thought) and then the destructive process in history and the central rôle of Christ would be overlooked. Our distinction does not imply, however, that in the pre-historic period of mankind special revelations were completely absent. But, as the passage dealing with Enoch <sup>5</sup> shows, nothing of the content of these revelations was remembered by later

<sup>5</sup> Gen. V:22-24.

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generations. Special revelation implies an act of singling out the recipients of its manifestation from the rest of mankind. It is only at a relatively recent date in history, at the time of Abraham, that this divine process of selecting certain persons is clearly recognisable, and it took Israel some centuries to fully understand its implications. Although they were prepared to recognise Yahveh as their sole God, slowly only did they learn to grasp the true meaning and implications of their belief. They had to distinguish between a God whom the nation had chosen to be worshipped as its peculiar God—as was done in pagan henotheism—and a God who had chosen them as His people; a God who was the God of all mankind, notwithstanding the fact that He had made a special covenant with them.

### *2. Nature of Holy History*

Holy history is basically religious history. Yet in it religion differs fundamentally from its manifestations in secular history. There it is regarded primarily as human activity, that is, man acting upon the Deity; cult, ritual, sacrifices, discipline are therefore in the foreground. In holy history, religion was primarily conceived of as acceptance of special gifts of God, particularly of the revelation of His will and of His guidance in history.<sup>6</sup> Knowledge of the will of God and meditation on His Word are therefore central in Biblical religion. The Bible describes holy history as a process in which people are prepared

<sup>6</sup> It becomes evident from this distinction that when Schleiermacher defined religion as a "sentiment of absolute dependence" he attempted in an ambiguous way to combine the two kinds of religion. For feeling is characteristic of the heathen's reluctance to acknowledge the fact that in religion he is primarily receptive. In Biblical religion the basic feeling is love, confidence, and gratitude, that is, joyful acceptance of the divine gifts.



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to follow God's bidding, while in secular history "the nations walk in their own counsels." <sup>7</sup>

There are four factors which characterise holy history; God speaks His Word to His messengers; He forms an historical group for the service of His purpose; He preserves this group in a miraculous way, and finally He makes this group the center of history. The religion underlying holy history is preëminently a religion of the Word, but not, as in Brahmanism or Buddhism, one of holy poetry or philosophy composed by men. It is, above all, the Word that God has spoken to His chosen ones and by which He has manifested His purposes—a Word which, notwithstanding God's general revelation and the operation of "common grace," has been misinterpreted in secular history. There have been thousands of prophets, soothsayers and holy men outside of holy history, but the inspirations and illuminations which were theirs were tainted by their prejudices and superstitions. Those men only whose visions and ambitions were recorded in the Bible were of such pure and complete receptivity that nothing essential of the divine revelation was lost when they expressed it in their own language.

### 3. *The Two Covenants*

Notwithstanding the continuity of holy history there are two periods in it which differ considerably in character, those of the Old and the New Covenant. Although the people of the Old Covenant had been given all the promises of God, they were ignorant of their actual meaning and fulfillment. All Israelites identified the blessings of God more or less with the

<sup>7</sup> Ps. 81:12.

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political future of their nation. The revealed truth was so great and unbelievable that it required a divine heart to grasp its implications, although it was so simple that a child could understand it; and the promised benefits of God were so measureless that only divine love was capable of believing in them. The incarnation of Christ, therefore, was a necessary event in holy history.

The Covenant which God made in Jesus Christ was the continuation of the Old Covenant made with the Fathers, and yet at the same time it was new. Membership in the Covenant was no longer limited to the Jewish people but extended to the spiritual seed of Abraham, and the requirement demanded was faith in the Lord Who made the Covenant rather than the performance of good works or of rites. The New Covenant did not invalidate the Old. But the historical situation had changed in the days of Jesus and thus it was possible to make men of all nations members of the chosen people.

Thus the New Covenant had a significance far beyond holy history; by it the whole of history was changed. The Old Aeon was thereby brought to a close and a New Aeon was inaugurated.<sup>8</sup> In the Old Aeon before the coming of Christ, Satan was the prince of this world, but his power was not sufficiently known to men. In the New Aeon, Christ reigns, although Satan is not yet annihilated and still displays considerable power. Moreover, while both in the Old and in the New Aeon the teleology of holy history is determined by the activity of the Holy Spirit who descends from the Father and the Son, He is the spirit of the Logos Asarkos in the Old Aeon, and of

<sup>8</sup> AV renders the Greek word "aion" invariably by "world": e.g., "this world," "the new world" or "the world to come," etc.



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the Logos Incarnate in the New. This explains the fact that in Israel holy history shows a closer analogy with secular history than with church history. For Israel's development, like any other process of secular history, has as its basis a natural unit, that is, a tribe and later a nation. In the New Aeon the natural factor recedes, and the redeeming work of the Son comes into the foreground. Moreover, the historical significance of God's chosen people was hidden in the Old Aeon. They seemed to be the object of the policy of foreign powers rather than an agent of history; but in the New Aeon the "people of God" became conspicuously the center of history. Thereby God made plain that He was Himself the agent of holy history.

## CHAPTER IV

### ISRAEL, MY SERVANT

#### A. ENIGMATIC CHARACTER OF JEWISH HISTORY

**H**OLY history is mainly the history of two groups, the Jewish people and the church. It is not necessary for our purpose to enumerate all the facts which constitute these two histories. This task has already been performed by many able scholars. It is our purpose to indicate briefly those elements by which the specific nature of holy history becomes evident in these historical developments.

Many people, while not denying the operation of divine Providence in history, hold, nevertheless, that, from the historian's point of view, holy history is not distinguishable from secular.

Yet there is one historical phenomenon which, when studied carefully, refutes this assumption, namely the existence of the Jewish people. It is not by chance that the presence of this people has puzzled their neighbors from the very beginning and that, unlike any other nation in history, they have been persecuted, hated and exploited, on the one hand, and admired and imitated, on the other, even by their adversaries. To the historian their existence and age are stumbling blocks which overthrow all his generalisations. Their history is an insoluble riddle to those who place all processes and events in history



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on the same plane, for their development and preservation manifest that God Himself had singled them out from the nations.

Israel has maintained her internal unity despite the loss of political power and of territory. No other nation has suffered a similar fate without being wiped from the book of history. Israel has been persecuted and her children have been massacred by the scores of thousands, and yet she grows and prospers. Moreover, while other nations, though they have preserved their original religion, have nevertheless modified it almost beyond cognisance in the course of historical development, Israel's religious basis has remained identical for more than three thousand years, and her leaders have watched carefully over the purity of her belief and of her worship. By the very fact that religion is the heart and unchanging center of Israel, she differs essentially from all other nations, and thereby gives outward expression to the fact that her history is holy history, history which is governed and directed by God Himself.

### B. ISRAEL'S ELECTION

Holy history as a definite history begins with Abraham, that is to say at a relatively late moment in the history of mankind. Advanced civilisations had already developed and collapsed. But probably at his time the moment had first been reached when the purpose of God could be carried out as an uninterrupted historical process.

Abraham was singled out from the rest of mankind and made the exponent of the divine purpose. From the positivistic point of view there was nothing in Abraham and his

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descendants which made them more fit than any other group or nation for such a purpose. The Old Testament itself emphasises continually, that the only reason for their election was the love and mercy of God. They were in no way wiser or more skilful or courageous than other people. But Abraham was a man who believed in the gracious love of God and therefore in His word, "against hope," and this faith became the heritage of his progeny. Unreserved acknowledgment of God as God distinguished the people of Israel from their contemporaries. Their faith did not make them free from sin and immorality: the Old Testament records many crimes and wicked deeds committed even by the leaders of Israel. But unlike the pagans these men acknowledged their guilt before God. Thus despite their sins they walked in the truth of God.

By the fact that He chose Israel, rather than any other nation, as an instrument for the accomplishment of His purpose, God showed Himself the Lord of History. Man can decide by his own will to live historically; but he is not free to take part or not to take part in the history of salvation. To do so depends on a special call from God. But the election of Israel did not originate in any arbitrary action or partiality on the part of God. He chose the Israelites as instruments for the realisation of His purpose. They were called to be His witnesses before the world of nations.<sup>1</sup> Through their preservation, and through the testimony that they would bear to Him, God's praise should be shown forth.<sup>2</sup> They, first of all men, were enabled by God to become conscious of the dignity of human nature which consists in the capacity of willingly glorifying God. Although it is not possible for fallen man to attain to his

<sup>1</sup> Is. XLIII:12; XLIV:8.

<sup>2</sup> Is. LXIII:21; LX:2.



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divine destiny by a sinless life, Israel did it in the way still left to man, namely, by acknowledging the mercy that God had shown to her. Hence it was that even through trials, persecutions and humiliations, Israel showed forth the praise of the Lord. For her history manifested not only God's patient long-suffering and indefatigable forbearance, but also His mercy and the power by which He granted her help and new prosperity after the many terrific catastrophes she had been obliged to suffer.

Abraham was not chosen for his own sake but for the good of the whole of mankind. To this end it was necessary that his election should have historical consequences. The Word of God, as spoken to him and his posterity, was to become public; God therefore did not utter it in secret, "in a place of the land of darkness."<sup>3</sup> Hence holy history led to the formation of an historical group, because, as we have seen in Chapter III, group life is the prerequisite of historical activity. The peculiarity of Israel consisted in the fact that she was not merely a natural group, a family or tribe, but a group which was bound together by a divine Covenant. From the very beginning Abraham and his descendants were aware of the divine privileges, as well as the special obligations, which were implied in their election. They had the promise of special blessings, but their fulfillment depended on their allegiance to the revealed will of God. Moreover, God made it clear beyond doubt that their disobedience would meet with more severe punishment than the wickedness of the heathen, because the will of God had been proclaimed to them. This divine threat should dispel the last remnant of suspicion that

<sup>3</sup> Is. LXV:19.

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God was partial in choosing Israel as His people. Privileges and obligations were justly balanced in her history.

The emphasis laid on the revealed will of God distinguished the religion of the chosen people from that of the rest of the nations. The idea of an eternal commandment of God lifted man above nature and above his passions; God's promises, on the other hand, acted as stimuli to obedience even in situations when it seemed to be risky or foolish to follow His injunctions. By God's promises the Israelites were given confidence in the assistance of a superior power which was willing to help them when they were incapable of fulfilling His will of themselves. Moreover, the idea of a Covenant taught Israel that in this world they lived for the glory of God, not for their own sake. Thus religion was not conceived of by them as a means of enlarging their knowledge of the mysteries of the universe, as was the case in other higher religions of mankind. It enabled them rather to perceive the glory of God, of which the whole earth was full, and then to live "worthy of the calling" of such a glorious God. This emphasis on the divine will explains the absence of cosmological and anthropological speculations in Israel's religion.

It was this idea of the Covenant, moreover, which enabled Israel, in principle at least, to overcome the pagan idea that religion was a bargain between man and God. Although God had attached great promises to His Covenant, He nevertheless made clear that it was by His grace that the Covenant had been established, and that therefore no man had a legal claim to His benefits.



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## C. THE MAKING OF ISRAEL

### 1. *The Plan of History*

We have already indicated the fact that holy history follows a definite plan; this is made evident by the whole history of Israel. It involved a series of events by which Abraham and his progeny, and later the elect among his descendants, were singled out from the rest of mankind. Thus more or less simultaneously in a series of acts, God revealed His purpose and the proper way for its execution to selected members of His chosen people. All the events of this holy history had a teleological character; they pointed beyond their actual significance to developments to come: the sojourn of Jacob in Palestine pointed to the future conquest of the Promised Land, the forty years in the wilderness to the exile and dispersion of Israel, the kingship of David to the Messianic Kingship of Jesus. The revelations which God gave to selected members of His people were partly meant to illuminate the divine purpose underlying this historical process and partly to enable these people to act in a manner worthy of their calling. Thus each new act was connected with the promulgation of new divine commandments concerning the good life and true worship. These commandments were as continuous in their succession as the accompanying historical events. God never abrogated any of His ordinances, and each in turn was but a differentiation or an exposition of the previous ones. Moreover, God guided His people so that each divine interference yielded the greatest possible result for the actualisation of the plan of salvation. Hence in all His actions He worked in a way appropriate to the respective stage of spiritual and historical

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development reached by Israel. Although God was immutable and His decree could never change, His purpose was to be fulfilled in a different way in the early period of emigration from that of the post-exilic times. This accounts for such apparent contradictions as, for example, the fact that God commanded a Holy War to be waged for the conquest of Canaan, while at no subsequent time was a war of conquest ordered or divinely sanctioned. The same explanation is true for the changes in the social order, the introduction of kingship, the original insistence on the external forms of moral life and religious worship. The basic laws of growth underlying all historical life were not overruled by the divine dispensations. For the same reason, all the historical factors available at a certain moment were utilised by God for His purpose. Through the Father of Israel—Abraham—Sumerian civilisation became the heritage of Israel. Then successively the Hebrews underwent the influence of the Egyptians, Canaanites, Chaldeans, Phoenicians, Syrians and Assyrians. Later on Israel was brought into contact with the Greeks, the Romans, and the western world. God willed that His people should share in all the wisdom of this world and not be ranked below the level of other nations.

Nevertheless the Old Testament, as we have previously shown, did not thereby become a collection of deposits of foreign civilisations. All these influences served merely as raw material and the revealed Word of God was given to the Hebrews to illuminate their value and true meaning. Because of the activity of the spirit of God there was continuity in Israel's history—God constantly renewed the oaths which He had sworn to Abraham—and yet each man and each period



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had its specific meaning. In accordance with a primarily religious outlook, Israel characterised the specific contribution of each period by the name of the man who, by a new revelation of God, was instrumental in introducing it into her history. Thus Jacob signifies a group—the first generation of his descendants—as well as an individual, because he was the center of integration in history through which the segregation of the chosen people was inaugurated and true religion as an historical phenomenon was made possible. Similarly Moses was called the author of the Torah, notwithstanding the fact that Deuteronomy was composed by prophetic writers after his death. For Moses was the first to give a law to Israel while all later legislation was but an amendment, as it were, or exposition of this basic law. For the same reason David could be called the author of the Psalter, although some of its hymns may date from post-exilic times. But he was obviously the creator or outstanding representative of this kind of poetry, destined for the worship of Yahveh.

### *2. Israel's Education*

In holy history the divine activity is carried out by the correlation of historical events and revelations. Yet as a result of the nominalism which has become so prevalent in modern Protestantism, holy history is often interpreted as consisting merely of the communication of the divine will to the minds of the prophets through a law. But if this interpretation were true, large portions of the Old Testament which contain historical records would be valueless for us. The fact is, however, that ancient Hebrew religion, from its very beginning, was eminently an historical religion. The oldest documents of

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Hebrew poetry such as Moses' Song <sup>4</sup> or Deborah's Song <sup>5</sup> are proofs of this. It was Israel that first became aware of history as a process that moves towards a divinely appointed end. Her greatest prophets, Jeremiah and Isaiah, for example, did much to illuminate the mystery of history. On the other hand, God Himself in His revelations frequently referred to His activity in Israel's history. Such events as the calling of Abraham, the sojourn in Egypt, the Exodus, the forty years in the wilderness, the conquest of Canaan, the kingship of David, the Exile, the return to Palestine and the rebuilding of the Temple were mentioned as signs of God's might and righteousness, and of His care for His chosen ones. By pointing to His gracious deeds in the past God confirmed the truth of new revelations. If they seemed to be incredible, Israel was asked to remember that they were given by the "God of the Fathers," by Him Who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the "land of bondage." Even as there is but one God, there is but one divine will, the same in His activities in history, in His legislation and in His promises. In every respect God aims at the same end, the manifestation of His glory. It was for this end that he enabled Israel by word and deed to attain to self-consciousness, to a comprehensive and adequate understanding of her divine mission. His benefits and blessings, as well as the hatred and oppression of her enemies, formed Israel's education.

Thus Israel's history shows a continuous development. Portions of the chosen people, even a majority at times, abandoned the divine truth. Yet in the darkest days of her history God sent His prophets, who not only called the people back to the

<sup>4</sup> Exod. XV:1-19.

<sup>5</sup> Judges V.



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tradition of their fathers, but were also commissioned to communicate new revelations of the divine will. While the historical development of other nations gradually came to a close, holy history went on through the ages unerringly and unfailingly. Whenever the chosen people seemed to be devoid of all resources, God miraculously delivered them from their enemies and cared for their physical needs as well as for their spiritual health and nurture. Thereby God called forth faith, which in turn became the source of such new actions as were in accordance with the divine plan.<sup>6</sup> Thus Moses, the judges, the first kings of Israel or the great prophets were men who, by trust in the word of God, made history. The prophets as men of God exercised political as well as religious functions. The succession of prophets who fashioned Israel's policy according to the revealed will of God is one of the outstanding features of her history. It has no parallel in secular history. It was by her unswerving faith that ancient Israel was enabled to survive six empires; and by her faith she is still in existence today. We must not, however, see in her success "the triumph of the psychical factor over the material." For what saved the Jews from ruin was the fact that they had the Word of God and accepted it as the basis of their belief rather than the intensity and tenacity of their ability to believe. Israel's development therefore differs substantially from that of all other nations. In other countries historical growth and greatness are due to the cultivation of natural faculties, while the Israelites had to suppress many tendencies which their neighbors were allowed to cherish. Whereas in other nations poets and sages flattered their native countries, Israel's prophets incessantly scourged

<sup>6</sup> Jer. XX:9.

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their people. Thus it was not their will and nature but the Word of God that made the Jews what they were. The divine revelations which helped to build up Israel were partly admonitions and injunctions, partly comforting and uplifting words, and partly predictions of imminent or more remote events. For our purpose the latter are particularly important. To dismiss them as human accretions to the divine revelation (Althaus) is to misinterpret revelation altogether. In the same way that God's Word referred to His activities in the past, so it foretold the future benefits which He would impart to His believers.

But the prophets never thought they should teach merely the moral laws underlying history. They knew that God manifested Himself as the Lord of History by prophesying to them events which would actually come to pass! This verification of prophecies by their fulfillment was regarded as the strongest criterion of a true prophet.

The coördination of historical events and divine revelations explains the nature of the historical books of the Old Testament. Not everything that was remembered of the past was deemed worthy of being preserved in sacred literature. Most of the historical records and histories of Israel have perished. The only facts worth remembering were the deeds of God, not those of men. Thus the inspired men who composed the historical sections of the Bible made a very careful selection from the material available. That is the reason why it is almost impossible to write a history of Israel based exclusively on the Old Testament. Yet we should misunderstand completely the meaning of the historical books of the Old



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Testament if we used them primarily for the satisfaction of our historical curiosity.

### *3. The Formation of the Chosen People*

By His special revelations, given in holy history, God aimed at the formation of an historical group which should carry out His purpose. While in secular history special revelations are granted to individuals as such and therefore perish with them, the prophets of Israel received their revelations, not for private edification, but for the education of the whole people.

The formation of an organised people of God's choice was not only not a detour in the divine economy but a necessity. God's purpose was to educate men so that eventually each should personally believe in Him. Thus although He made a natural grouping, namely the Abrahamites, the starting point of His activity, He gradually transformed the nature of this group by means of the Covenant which He made with them. Thereby the natural group also became an institution, and it was this institutional character of Israel which rendered her fit to become God's instrument in history. If Israel had been merely a naturally formed people, like other nations, her national religion would have led to collective pride and self-righteousness. The "God of a nation" is but the idol of its self-glorification. There was in Israel for many centuries a tendency towards such a development. But by His Covenant God precluded it from becoming general. Thus whatever blessing the individual received derived from the fact that by His grace God had made such a person partaker of the Covenant. Thus God succeeded in gradually educating Israel

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towards a personal type of religion. The individual, while thinking collectively of his membership in the nation, would realise at the same time that it was a personal act of divine favor that he was a member of it. In Hosea and Jeremiah the first signs of this transformation are clearly seen. It is by the idea of a Covenant that God imbued Israel's mind with the recognition that her election and the universality of God's plan of salvation organically belonged together. The Israelites never abandoned the idea of the unity of mankind, whereas all other nations acquiesced in the fact that by national differentiation the empirical unity of mankind—if it ever had existed—was irretrievably lost. Israel interpreted her election as a divine measure by which she was made the Lord's servant and instrument in history for all mankind.

But the Jews did not think of the unity of mankind in a naturalistic way. Although all peoples are God's by nature, there is a fundamental difference between them and the chosen people. They are the gentiles. It was not Jewish presumption but God's purpose, according to which He imparted His revelation to Abraham and to his seed, that created the wide and unbridgeable gulf between Israel and the rest of the world.

### *4. The Remnant*

Finally the fact that Israel was a covenanted people, rather than a natural political unity, explains why there was always a distinction between the born members of Israel and the people of the Covenant. And yet the two cannot really be separated from each other, for it was the chosen people in the midst of Israel which determined both her political and her spiritual destiny. The Covenant stipulated that Abraham's seed should



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inherit the divine blessings if it were obedient to God's will. The strictness with which God insisted on this pact explains both the amazing success and expansion and the terrible catastrophes in Israel's life. There was no period or situation in their history in which God allowed the Jews to keep neutral or to remain indifferent. Each event that took place in their midst, or in their neighborhood, was made a religious issue and they had to decide for or against God's decree manifested in it. On each such occasion many of them fell away, and it was always a small minority, a "remnant," that remained faithful. But this remnant formed the nucleus of the chosen people. The rest of Israel, as far as it accepted their decision or recognised them as the genuine Israelites, was saved together with them. Those who separated themselves from them (such as the Samaritans and many Jews in the diaspora) or rejected them, were cut off from their source of life. They rapidly lost significance and eventually were swallowed up by their neighbors. Yet the faith which the remnant had shown at a certain time was not a perpetual heritage. It even occasionally happened that the posterity of a former remnant sided against God's decree, notably the Pharisees in the days of Jesus—the Pharisees whose fathers had fought the Maccabean wars and preserved Israel from religious syncretism!

The remnant always acted vicariously for the whole nation, and thus preserved Israel continuously as an historical body. But God made clear that the remnant was chosen by His mercy, even as the people as a whole. When God singled it out, His love was therefore not departmental. It was due to historical conditions that God confined His special grace to those whom He deemed, at a given moment, fit agents of His

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purpose. The more the process of redemption continued in history the more rigorous God became in His choice.

### D. ISRAEL'S FAILURE

#### 1. *The Deadlock*

From the very beginning Israel's history was holy history and in every phase served the divine purpose. But this was due to God's interference, not to the will of the Jews. It was certainly a great temptation for the Jews, while taking part in an historical process so full of blessings and so helpful to mankind, to imagine that its wholesome results derived from the historical factors which composed it rather than from God Who directed it. So God had to make clear that He Himself was the Lord of holy history. There were two problems which could not be solved by the immanent development of Israel's history, that of the meaning of the Law and that of religious nationalism. We have shown that the election of Israel rested upon the Covenant. But thus the Law became a burden to the Jew. Whereas other nations legislated for their own good and thus adopted laws to suit their wishes and faculties, the chosen people had received a Law from God, which was to serve the good of mankind rather than their own good and which, in the shape of a national law, made exacting and almost intolerable claims upon them. A pious Jew would accept everything in life as sent by God and obey the Law, but would sigh under its yoke, because God did not give reasons for His decrees.<sup>7</sup> At the same time the connection which God had established between obedience to His will and the distribution of His benefits

<sup>7</sup> See Franz Werfel, *Paul Among the Jews*.



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almost forced a Jew to regard his own piety and good words as the efficient means of his salvation.

But both conclusions were detrimental to the execution of the divine purpose. The chosen people could not attain to awareness of its mission as long as it regarded the divine will as coming from the outside and thus loading burdens upon man; and men were not able to perceive the true source of salvation as long as they believed that their eternal destiny depended on the moral quality of their own activities. The Old Covenant revealed the glory of the Law. But Israel had never fully understood that the Law was not an end in itself and that the Lord was above His Law. It was in vain that the exilic writer in the book of Isaiah pointed to the teleological function of the Law as manifested in the vicarious suffering of the Servant of God, and that Job finally found comfort in the idea that the will of God was incomprehensible to mortal men.

The Law was to be succeeded by a higher revelation of God. The fragmentary character of God's former revelation, however, was not in itself an obstacle to the fulfillment of Israel's mission. Although God only disclosed the mysteries of His righteousness and power gradually, the Old Testament shows clearly that at every period of the Old Covenant it was possible for the Jews to carry out the will of God. What the Lord expected His people to do was to perform His will as far as it had been manifested and, for the rest, to be content with knowing that He Himself infinitely transcended His revelations. Instead, post-exilic Judaism either pretended that the will and purpose of God were confined to His prior revelation, or attempted by speculative ideas and reasoning to supplement what seemed to be lacking in this revelation.

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This anthropocentric tendency was still more accentuated by the development of religious nationalism. Since the Jews had been elected by God and commissioned to be His witnesses in the world, it appeared logical that everyone should be obliged to become a Jew in order to enjoy the privileges and benefits of the Covenant. Hence, after the exile, the Jews proselytised on a large scale. But this process would have resulted in making the whole world Jewish, and so would have destroyed national peculiarities. An aspect of mankind would have been lost essential to its perfection—the diversity of nations.

The Jews themselves, as we have shown, realised in the days of Jesus that something was wrong in their history. But they could not discover the defect nor were they able to overcome this deadlock. A divine event was required which would split up, as it were, their whole history, and yet in reality bring it to consummation. This was brought about by the Incarnation.

### 2. *Christ in Israel*

The divine proof of our contention that the Jews were the chosen people of God was given by the fact that the final salvation of mankind came from them.<sup>8</sup> Jesus Christ, our Saviour and the Saviour of the whole world, was of Jewish extraction. The modern attempts to deny this fact involve rejection of the whole New Testament testimony. For the apostolic writers are unanimous in their witness to His origin from David's family. The fact that he had no earthly father did not raise His human nature above that of the other human races, as some German anti-Semites contend. If the church is right in teach-

<sup>8</sup> John IV:22.



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ing that He was truly man at all, then He certainly was a man of Jewish race.

Jesus conceived of His life as a mission for Israel, which was to be executed within the frame of holy history. He knew that He was sent to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.<sup>9</sup> Moreover although He was aware of His Messianic dignity, He preferred not to act as a revolutionary, but rather believed He was sent "to fulfil the Law and the Prophets," as contained in His people's Holy Scriptures. It is, therefore, impossible to understand the meaning of His message if it is detached from the Old Testament. The Holy Scripture of the Old Covenant was not merely the source by which His spiritual life was nurtured, but also the divine justification of His activity. The Scriptures testified of Him.<sup>10</sup> Apart from its connection with the Old Testament His teaching is in large portions unintelligible, for not infrequently He hinted at Old Testament doctrines without expanding them in detail, because He presupposed that His audience was fully acquainted with them. He did not come to bring a new religion in place of an obsolete one, but rather to throw new light upon the ever fresh revelation of the eternal God and so to set it into right relief.

The close connection which Jesus Christ had with the people of the Old Testament was emphasised by God Himself when He made Palestine the center of the New Covenant as well as of the Old. In this country the Son of God was born and at Jerusalem, the Holy City, the work of salvation was consummated. Before the Jews lost their leadership in holy history the seed of Christ's word had been sown in the Promised Land. Firmly rooted in its soil, it was able to spread over all the

<sup>9</sup> Matth. X:6.

<sup>10</sup> John V:39.

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globe. Thus Christ's whole work bore witness to the continuity of holy history.

On the other hand, it is only from Jesus Christ that the purposiveness which characterises holy history under the Old Covenant can be recognised. Apart from Him Israel's history would be fragmentary, like the history of so many other religions. If modern Judaism had been the goal of Israel's history then it would have been man-made history which, after a period of vitality, would stagnate and finally vanish. But the inscription on the Cross which called Jesus "the King of the Jews" revealed the divine mystery of holy history. The King of God's chosen people was destined to be crucified by the rulers of this world. It was by the Cross that the cleavage between Israel and the other nations was disclosed, as well as her exceptional position in history. It was therefore of the utmost importance for the Jews to acknowledge Jesus as their divinely appointed King.

### *3. The Catastrophe of Israel*

Jews and Christians agree in their interpretation of Jewish history as far as the pre-Christian era is concerned: it was holy history. But their views differ when they turn to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and to the subsequent dispersion of the Jews. From the Christian point of view there is a direct causal connection between these events and the crucifixion of Jesus. The fate of the Jews is the divine punishment for their rejection of the promised Messiah. The Jews, however, find fault with everyone except themselves. It is true that in our days some of them admit that it was a mistake or even a crime on the part of the Sanhedrin to sentence Christ to death. But



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personally they are not willing to share the responsibility for this atrocious crime.

Yet the death of Christ was not an isolated event in the Jewish history of His time; it was the logical and inevitable outcome of the attitude which Israel, as such, took towards the will of God. They distorted the Law and the Prophets, because they regarded their political and religious history as important in itself and thus they detracted from the divine purpose in history. Because of the way in which they interpreted their position they thought they could determine God's future revelations in advance. Thus they made themselves incapable of believing God, when in Jesus Christ He revealed His will in an entirely new and unexpected manner. Others were entirely negligent about the conditions which God had attached to His Covenant. They trusted in the fact that they were Abraham's seed and hoped for the "luck of Jacob." The result was shameless arrogance and moral and religious indifference. A conflict between these "guardians" of Israel's tradition and Jesus was bound to come to pass; and the issue was so vital that it could not fail to be deadly. For, from the point of view of official Judaism, Jesus undermined the Law and questioned the divine mission of the chosen people. But His crucifixion was not the work of some Jewish rulers only, who in their injustice and envy hated Christ as their rival. For the rest of Israel—with the exception of the few who became Christians—followed their official leaders, and thereby tacitly approved of Jesus' pitiful end. Hence all Jews were responsible for His death. This is the reason they all have to endure the divine punishment.

Through their own fault the Jews have caused their mission

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to mankind to become a failure. They were called to impart the divine truth to all nations. But after the crucifixion of the Messiah they became a religious group which was unable longer to attract any considerable number of the gentiles. The loss of the Holy Land was the divine sign that Israel's universal mission had come to a close. Since that time the Jews are concerned with themselves alone in their religious life, however much they may take part in the economic, social, political and cultural life of other peoples. Israel's historical mission has been handed over to the fellowship which Christ gathered around Him. The purpose of God in history is now carried out by the church.



## CHAPTER V

### THE JEWISH PROBLEM

#### A. ANTI-SEMITISM

**E**VERYONE feels that there is a Jewish problem, although it seems difficult exactly to define its nature.

Modern anti-semites rightly feel that if they had merely a religious motivation for their hate and persecution of the Jews, they would move on slippery ground. Hence they adduce racial or economic or moral reasons for their enmity. They extol their race over the "degenerate" Jewish race and stress the wide gulf which separates the Aryan or Nordic race from the Semites. But they find no fault with other Semites, nor with other races equally unlike their own. Or they fight the Jews for their influence on economic life. But they do not deem it necessary to fight capitalists of Nordic or other extraction who exploit the masses by means of their monopolistic position; and on the other hand their hatred does not spare the poor and needy Jew. Others will accuse the Jews of clannishness and nepotism; but anti-semites themselves show a strong tendency to form exclusive groups which aspire to monopolistic positions in politics. Or anti-semites denounce "the deep immoral nature of the Jews." But it has never been evident that these same people have been particularly anxious to fight immorality among non-Jews. There must therefore be something in the Jewish people which irritates men and which

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lies deeper and is less tangible than racial, economic or social factors.

Yet similar inconsistency is found in the attitude of many people who disapprove of the ideas of anti-semitism and of the persecution of the Jews or who have friendly contact with them. They complain, nevertheless, about Jews as groups, about their pretentious behavior in restaurants or at the sea-shore and about their clannishness in economic, social and political life. The reason for these inconsistencies is to be found in God's own attitude towards the Jews.

We have said that the dispersion of the Jews is a divine punishment inflicted upon them for the crucifixion of Jesus and the rejection of His gospel. But why should modern Jews be punished for the crime and the sins which their ancestors perpetrated nineteen hundred years ago? Moreover, how can the difference which exists between the fate of the Jews and that of the Romans be explained when both groups were equally responsible for the death of our Lord? From the merely legal point of view, Rome's responsibility for it rests upon the Roman authorities, represented by the Procurator Pontius Pilate, to an even greater degree than upon the Sanhedrin and, from the historical point of view, Rome's connivance with the Jewish aristocracy also contributed largely to the continual intensifying of the conflict between Christ and His adversaries. Why is it then that God preserved the Jewish people from extinction, whereas the Roman people and its state have vanished completely? On the one hand, the Jewish people is being punished by God for rejecting Christ, but, on the other, the Covenant with Abraham is still in effect.



## THE JEWISH PROBLEM

### B. THE BLINDNESS OF THE JEWS

Jewish history is primarily spiritual history, yet in the spiritual history of mankind the Jews form a group by themselves, different both from the church and from apostates and gentiles. The modern Jew suffers with his ancestors because he shares their attitude towards Jesus. The Jews have never denied the truthfulness of God's revelations and, like their ancestors, they reverence the Old Testament as their Bible and acknowledge the Torah as their Law. They believe in the Covenant which God made with Abraham as passionately and confidently as did their fathers, and they firmly hope to inherit the blessings promised therein. They differ from Christians merely by their refusal to believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament and that He has already wrought the redemption of mankind. The rejection of Jesus Christ is their basic sin, because their own Bible testifies of Him. Yet as a result of the idea which they hold of God's will, they make themselves unable to apprehend the living Word that God is speaking to them through His Son.

No one can deny the sinfulness of their refusal. Even the Jews in our day are ready to admit it. Notwithstanding its gravity, however, it is not the sin of apostasy. Their rejection of Christ is based upon what they think is the revealed will of God. Hence their sin is not a breach of the Covenant which God made with them; and therefore it will not result in their annihilation. In the temporal realm they have been deprived of their country and dispersed over all the world; they are despised and disliked by the nations; and in the spiritual realm

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they have lost their leadership in holy history. Their blindness has made them unable to lead the gentiles to God.

What makes it so difficult for most modern people to understand the fate of modern Jewry, however, is the fact that they think of the saving activity of God in an unhistorical way. But while it is true that His grace is imparted to each man in a personal manner, it is nevertheless offered by means of an historical process. Because God and not man is the agent of holy history, the individual is not free to decide whether or not he will take part in it. Since God has chosen the father, the son is under obligation to keep the Covenant as well. This is the substance of the Covenant made with Abraham. And on Mount Sinai this idea was explicitly reaffirmed when God said: "For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments." <sup>1</sup>

But the historical character of God's special revelation would be merely accidental were it not that God had a purpose in acting historically. God's Covenant with Abraham was an everlasting one.<sup>2</sup> If God had invalidated it when He made His new Covenant in Jesus Christ, how then could we put confidence in the new Covenant? God might revoke this Covenant as well. As St. Paul shows,<sup>3</sup> the certainty of our faith rests entirely upon the faithfulness of God. If Israel had been but the instrument by which God prepared the coming of His kingdom and not the lasting object of His grace as well, there would be no certainty of individual salvation. What we inter-

<sup>1</sup> Exod. XX:5-6.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. XVII:7.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. III:4; IX.



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pret as our calling might be but the rationalisation of the fact that God makes use of us as His instruments. But God's purpose is not merely to bring about a perfect state of the world, but also to let man share in the glory of His activity. This explains the fact that the children of the Jews who crucified Jesus are visited for their fathers' sin, but are nevertheless children of the Covenant. Just as the sins of ancient Israel did not result in the dissolution of the historical Covenant, and as the sins of Christians do not preclude them from receiving the grace of the New Covenant, so are modern Jews not cut off from the people of the Covenant. Therein is evident the mercy of God.

Moreover, even their punishment offers proof of God's wisdom and goodness. The Jews in the dispersion, even against their will, are used for the establishment of the Kingdom of Christ. St. Paul, by his profound dissertation of this mystery, in Romans IX–XI, helps us clearly to understand the nature of holy history.

If the Jews had been ready to acknowledge Christ as the divine fulfillment of their hopes, the acceptance of Him would have been the outcome of their righteousness. As reward they would then have inherited all the blessings of the Covenant. God would then have been unjust in granting the same blessings to the gentiles whom history had not led to the Gospel. Israel would have been saved, and the rest of the world lost. Thus God permitted the sin of their rejection of Christ, so that all men might be saved by grace.<sup>4</sup> There is probably no mystery of history deeper than this.

It is on this basis only that we can understand how important

<sup>4</sup> Rom. III:23–24; XI:25.

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it was for the early church that Jerusalem should be destroyed in A.D. 70, and the Jews scattered over the globe. The wild hate which the Jewish leaders showed for Christianity was not in itself effective enough to bring about a clear-cut separation between the two religions. The existing historical connection between early Christianity and Palestine Judaism compelled the gentile Christians to take the traditions of the Old Covenant seriously. But about 70 A.D., when the new religion was sufficiently deeply grounded in the Old Testament, there was not longer any danger that it would be perverted into something similar to the unhistorical mystery religions of the time by its formerly pagan followers. Hence God then compelled the Jewish Christian group in Palestine, by means of historical events, to dissociate itself from Judaism and thereby from the ceremonial law and temple worship. Thus Christian religion acquired its full independence.

### C. MODERN JUDAISM

Modern Jewry, as we have shown, belongs to holy history, and the nature and fate of the Jews in modern times cannot therefore be explained by empirical factors such as race alone. For there are at least four entirely different racial types to be found among modern Jews. It is their spiritual history which has fashioned them. They would no longer be in existence as a separate people but for the tenacity with which they have always clung to the Old Testament. They have become the incarnation of the Torah. How much easier would have been their fate if they had abandoned the faith of their fathers and joined the religions of the nations which granted them hospitality. The Roman Empire persecuted them for their religion



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which, it was charged, led to hate and contempt of mankind. During the middle ages conversion to the Christian religion was almost invariably the way by which a Jew could escape persecution. It is their religion, the belief in the Covenant, and in themselves as the chosen people which has determined their characteristics.

Once they had lost Palestine, their religion necessarily made them homeless and restless, for there was no other country that could occupy the place of the "Promised Land." Their restlessness therefore cannot be explained by the lack of hospitality which the other nations showed them. Jews have never been able to develop total allegiance to any other country, because none was theirs; and they have never felt that it was an inner necessity for them to settle in one country rather than in another.

Similarly it is misleading to attribute the peculiarities of modern Judaism primarily to their many centuries of life in the ghetto. The ghetto had a deep influence upon them chiefly because the Jew carries the ghetto with him wherever he goes. For his religion teaches him that the chosen people differ basically from the rest of mankind, and thus he keeps aloof from them. He thinks and acts primarily as a Jew, not as a Frenchman, Englishman, American or German. This statement does not imply that he is unreliable politically. It only means that for the Jew—whether he realises it or not—his spiritual existence in holy history is superior to his empirical membership in secular history. The modern Jew is not primarily the product of external circumstances. These have brought to the forefront only what is in him, and I think it is a great illusion, shared by many liberal Jews, to believe that

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a long period of free development would bring about a complete change of the Jewish character. The only factor that can alter it, and actually does so, is a change of religion.

It is this allegiance to the Covenant and the Law which explains both the virtues and the faults of the Jews. For their faults are the "*défauts de leurs vertus*." Their constant meditation on the Law developed in them a special kind of intellect by which they were enabled to take a leading part in modern civilisation. For their mentality is in some respects akin to the rationalism which underlies the cultural development of modern mankind. No wonder that they excel in science, jurisprudence and industrial and commercial organisations. Moreover the worship of a transcendent God and their consequent eschatological expectations have filled their souls with lofty visions which find expression in their musical faculties. Obedience to the divine commandments has nurtured in them the upright sense of justice which makes them passionate champions of the cause of the oppressed. It is not surprising, therefore, that in all modern revolutions Jews should play a leading rôle. The sense of charity which the divine commandments have cultivated in them makes them willing to assist the needy and to contribute lavishly to all kinds of social and cultural causes. On the other hand they strive instinctively after success in life, economically, politically or socially, since their understanding of the Old Testament lacks that full insight into the spiritual character of holy history which Christ has brought to His church.

It requires a considerable amount of prejudice not to be impressed by the greatness of the Jewish character. Yet the Jew feels that his is a particularly hard life. For it lacks all



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the natural emotional outlets by which members of other nations are sustained in their moral difficulties, such as love of one's country, joy in her honor and glory, appreciation of her great past, a warm feeling of sympathy for members of the same nation. The Jew has nothing but the Old Testament and his belief in the Covenant to sustain him, and any concrete allegiance that he may feel for a country or a state will be mediated by the Law. Hence comes the paradoxical and hopeless situation of liberal Jews who have given up the Torah and hope to replace it by allegiance to the country in which they live. Continental anti-semitism should teach them that their hosts will not allow them to claim as a natural right a share in the political life of other nations.

The fate of the Jews is so hard that they are constantly tempted to evade it. It is not by chance that there are so many good actors among the Jews. Instinctively they attempt to assimilate themselves to their environment and to hide their Jewish characteristics. They try to be anything but themselves: the ideal requirement for an actor. Others attempt to end the misery of dispersion by an extraordinary affectation of holiness, or by violent political action such as the attempt of Zionists to conquer Palestine.

Nevertheless only those people attain to real greatness who accept their fate as rooted in the will of God to which they are ready to submit until He pleases to deliver them. But how few are there among the Jews who reach such heights of faith! Such life is almost beyond man's power. Many of them, as in the days of Israel, are indolent in spiritual matters. Their only belief is in the election of the Jews and they think that, as the chosen people, they will inherit the blessings of the

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Covenant irrespective of the quality of the life they live. Hence they despise the gentiles, become arrogant and importunate, and in a reckless way try to exploit the non-Jews. Although the Jews, as such, are no more immoral than any other race, the Jew who indulges in immoral actions becomes far more dangerous than a non-Jew in the same situation, because of the specific gifts which have been imparted to his people and have been developed in their history. This can be seen in the clever and subtle way with which he will act against the spirit of an enactment without, however, infringing the letter of the law, or in the brilliancy with which modern Jews in literature and the films glorify crimes and immorality while seemingly decrying them.

What makes the life of the good Jews so particularly hard in our day is the fact that anti-semitism seems to be justified by the actions of millions of Jews whose connection with their people is but that of blood-kinship and who have never set their foot in a synagogue or cared for the Torah. These Jews lack the inner controls and stimuli which obedience to the law brings about in the hearts of their faithful brethren. And mainly for their sins the name of God is blasphemed and Israel despised and hated. It seems, nevertheless, that they suffer less under anti-semitism than the good Jews. For, as everywhere in history, the wicked show greater cleverness in escaping their persecutors and in evading the harmful consequences of their evil actions. And yet it is God's will that it should be so and that the good Jew should suffer for the bad. For the good Jew cannot dissociate himself from his sinful brethren because the Covenant was made with the Jews as a people and not with individuals. The good Jews are



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the remnant of Israel for whose sake Judaism as a whole is allowed to entertain hopes for the future, and thus as in the first exile, they suffer vicariously for the whole people.

### D. THE JEWS AND THE NATIONS

Because of their election the Jews hold a unique and exceptional position among the nations. For they are the only people which belong to holy history as a natural entity. Through their coming into existence all other nations were degraded into mere instruments for the formation of God's elect people. The other nations are unable to understand the reason for Jewish self-assertiveness and regard it as intolerable presumption. Conflict and friction between the Jews and the people of the non-Jewish nations where they live are inevitable, for the difference between the natural and the supernatural is bound to lead to misunderstandings on either side. And yet it is for the good of the other nations that the Jews have been dispersed, and in so far as the non-Jewish peoples are willing to accept the divine gifts which the Jews bring to them, they benefit richly.

The very existence of the Jews, after such a long history of persecution and misery, must call forth the amazement of all men. If they believe in a God, the question necessarily arises: Who is their God? When Disraeli was asked what in his view was the most convincing proof of the existence of God, he replied: "The Jews!" This was certainly a good reply. For, as the anti-semites have rightly noticed, it is not due to their own achievements that this people have subsisted through all the vicissitudes of history. If their preservation were not the work of divine mercy there could be no God at all, and their

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existence could be explained only as the work of a devil who had no God over him. But this factual demonstration of God's existence is at the same time a warning to other nations. What will be *their* fate if God inflicts such harsh punishments on his chosen people? From the fact that Israel is preserved throughout the ages, they should learn that the firm and stable basis of a nation's safety is obedience to the will of God and nothing else. Since the Jews are now scattered over the world this lesson is taught to all nations.

Moreover the Jews have brought to the nations the treasures of the Law, above all, its pure, personalistic monotheism, and the idea of an absolute obligation in moral life. Philo, Avicbron, Moses Maimonides, Spinoza, Moses Mendelssohn and the Neo-Kantians of the twentieth century, to mention only some prominent names, have made lasting contributions to the philosophy of mankind.

Because of their place in holy history the presence of the Jews becomes a divine test for a nation: is it willing to practice righteousness and to act as an instructed judge? <sup>5</sup> God puts His question in a very concrete way: "When confronted with the Jewish problem, is such a nation prepared to do justice to the Jews?" Now it cannot be denied that the presence of the Jews is always a disquieting fact, but it is God's will to test a nation by the difficulties which are connected with their presence. The leaders of the nations will thereby be impelled to think over the whole problem of history. That there are bad Jews and that there is a Jewish solidarity, are facts which cannot be denied. It is therefore legitimate to punish the individual Jew when he breaks the laws, and to curb Jewish

<sup>5</sup> Ps. II:10.



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influence when it is exercised at the expense of non-Jewish competitors. But a clear distinction should be made between measures which are directed against the Jew as Jew, irrespective of his good or evil actions, and against the actual wrong doings of Jews.

The Jews as a people are part of the chosen people of God and therefore enjoy His special protection. This is the reason why anti-semitism is always detrimental to the nations which practice or tolerate it. The unrighteous mentality and the blind hatred of the anti-semites will turn against their own fellow men when it can no longer satisfy itself upon the Jews. Moreover the moral poison of anti-semitism will decompose the body social. It creates a type of racial pride which is blind to the faults of one's own people. God not only will preserve the Jews from total perdition, but every persecution will eventually turn to their advantage.

It will always be difficult to work out a satisfactory solution of the Jewish problem. As a matter of fact every settlement is bound to be a provisional one, because the Jews form an historical entity of their own. Hence no legislation can adequately deal with the problems raised by their presence. The Jewish question will remain insoluble to the nations because God has reserved its solution to Himself and He will bring it about at the end of holy history. Then the Jews will accept Christ, and when they have returned into the Father's house the curse of restlessness and contempt will be taken from them.

### E. THE JEWS AND THE CHURCH

Quite apart from the general interest which, as members

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of our respective nations, we take in the Jewish problem, we are concerned as Christians with the fate of Jewry. Not only do we share with them the Old Testament—the larger portion of our Bible—but also we belong to the same holy people of God. We must never forget that it was by the faithfulness of their ancestors that the people of God was formed in history. The church would never have come into existence if the Jews had forsaken God. Thus, as Paul reminds us, the "Church of the Gentiles" is not the original tree of life, but it is rather grafted into the olive tree which is Israel.<sup>6</sup>

But the historical development has resulted in a dialectical relationship between the Jews and the church. Notwithstanding the many and essential elements which they have in common, there can be no real understanding between them. The church came into existence as a result of the crucifixion of Jesus, and His cross will therefore perpetually separate Jews and Christians. Attempts are made both by Jews and by Christians to advocate mutual understanding. If these endeavors are for practical co-operation in social or humanitarian fields, they are legitimate; if they are destined to awaken Christians to the recognition of the spiritual implications of the Jewish problem, they are to be welcomed. But as soon as they tend to minimise the difference of religious outlook which exists between the two religions, they are bound to fail.

The Jews may be willing to acknowledge the greatness of Christ, but they only seek thereby to emphasise the greatness of Judaism, for they vindicate Jesus as their greatest son. If they should recognise Him as their Messiah and Saviour, they would no longer be able to be Jews. Liberal Protestants, on

<sup>6</sup> Rom. XI:17-18.



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the other hand, stress the fact that belief in one God and in the Ten Commandments are the essentials of our faith and that we hold them in common with our Jewish brethren. But they conceal from themselves the fact that Jesus Christ is the heart of our belief and that these other two fundamentals receive entirely new meaning when related to Him.

Israel is prior historically to the church; but while the church has already taken possession of the whole heritage which God promised to His people, the Jews stand outside and have to wait. But they are not altogether rejected. As Abraham's children they will one day enter the Kingdom. That is to say: notwithstanding the fact that Christianity has become the church of the gentiles, the Jews will not be compelled to give up the belief and practice of their fathers when the hour comes for them fully to recognise Jesus Christ as their Messiah. They will then form a Jewish section of the church, Jewish in its tradition but enlightened by the spirit of Christ. But according to God's purpose this will happen only when all the gentiles have already entered the church. This decree of God explains the slow progress and scant results of present missionary activity among the Jews. Such work has its legitimate place in the church; but the individual Jew who comes to Jesus is thereby automatically cut off from Israel after the flesh. He inherits all the blessings of the church, but loses the special prerogatives of the Jews. Hope in the final conversion of Israel as a whole must determine all our dealings with Jews and Judaism, notwithstanding the antagonism and tensions which exist at present between the two religions.

Yet beyond this eschatological relationship the existence of Israel is of immediate importance for the church. First of all

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its duration in history answers the basic question of church history: "How was it possible that the gentiles were incorporated as the people of God without becoming Jews, although the whole history of the chosen people up to the days of the early church was confined to the Jewish people?" The only answer is: "By the mercy of God." The gentiles were no better religiously or morally than the Jews. The share which the Roman administration had in the crucifixion of Jesus sufficiently elucidated pagan mentality. Were it not that God in His mercy had called the gentiles, for a time, to supplement the lack caused by the unbelief of the Jews, we should stand outside Christ's kingdom as well.

Moreover, the existence of Judaism reminds us of the historical character of God's revelations and confirms the belief that Christ carries on His purpose of salvation in history. This lesson precludes all kinds of timeless mysticism, of religious subjectivism, and individualism. The duration of the Jewish people strengthens our belief in the truthfulness of the Old Testament, for it shows that, in His dealings with the Jews, God still keeps the promise which He gave to Abraham. Furthermore, as part of the chosen people, the Jews portray, in a concrete way, the fate of God's elect in this world. As far as its earthly aspect is concerned the nature and structure of the church can be seen more clearly in Jewish history than in that of the church itself, because Israel is by nature a purely natural body. Hence her history reminds us of the loneliness of God's people in this world, and of the inevitable hate of the world, but also of the unfailing love and mercy of God. This typical function of the Jews is one of the most important revelations which we receive from history. Finally, the fact



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that from time to time some Jews are converted to the Christian faith is meant to educate the church. By accepting these Hebrew Christians into its membership a church is compelled to take the race problem seriously. For it would be absurd to give the Jewish brother full rights in the congregation while at the same time discriminating against him in social and political respects. Moreover, a church which connives at the slightest degree of anti-semitism, endangers the basis of its own existence, as may be learned from the fate of the church in Russia and of modern French Catholicism.

The existence of Judaism is also a warning and yet a safeguard against certain typical temptations which beset a church whose natural—or historical—background is pagan. For since we have the Old Testament in common with the Jews the church has no right simply to ignore their interpretation of God's revelation. Thus their insistence on the Law and the moral character of God warns us against the sentimental idea of a loving God who would no longer be the Judge of His world. Or when Christian supra-naturalism prompts us to make light of this world, the Jewish emphasis on God's work in creation will remind us of the ontological goodness of the world, notwithstanding the dominion which Satan has over it. Similarly Judaism has always rejected the separation between faith and action and taught that faith is life. Their faults, on the other hand, were castigated by Jesus so strikingly that only those who forget the fate of the Jews will indulge in a literalistic use of the Bible, or in the belief that salvation depends on the perfection of our religious and moral life.

Thus the presence of, and contact with, Jews must be regarded as arranged by divine Providence. But the church plays

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a providential rôle in the life of the Jews as well. Notwithstanding the fact that priests and popes and Christian laymen have taken part in persecutions of the Jews, the church, as such, is the strongest bulwark against anti-semitism. Through the canonical authority of the Old Testament the church is compelled by God to remember the supra-natural element in Judaism, and by its perpetual use of the Old Testament preserves the people of the Old Covenant from being stamped out. The only cogent arguments *against* the fury of the anti-semites can be drawn from the New Testament.

Thus in conclusion we can say that the Jews have forfeited their proper mission through their own fault and yet it took place with God's permission. But they still fulfill a mission among gentiles and Christians which is of the highest importance. Still there can be no real friendship between Christianity and Judaism, although it can exist between individuals of both groups. For their religions belong to two different aeons. Israel is ignorant about the fullness of time, while we know that the complete change in history has already been brought about. Israel lives in hope, we live in faith. But she has enabled us to have a church, and she still suffers for the purposes of God. Although we cannot approve of the attitude which she takes toward Christ's activity in holy history, we must love her as our elder sister with a deep and sincere compassion.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE CHURCH, HANDMAIDEN OF THE LORD

#### A. HISTORICAL NATURE OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

##### *1. The New Dispensation in Christ*

WE HAVE shown how holy history took place in a series of dispensations; but the new dispensation in Jesus Christ differed fundamentally from all those under the Old Covenant. For notwithstanding the causal continuity between the dispensations and the substantial identity of the Covenant, the Incarnation brought about a complete change in the teleological structure of history. It has been pointed out how the development of the three great historical forces of the ancient world had practically come to a standstill in the days of Jesus, and how men found themselves unable to overcome this deadlock.

The human race which was destined by God to set forth His praise, by means of historical life, had missed its chance twice in history. General revelation contained all the elements necessary for a truly human life. But man did not make sufficient use of them. The prehistoric age terminated in such a state of history that God Himself repented that He had made man.<sup>1</sup> In order to succor the weakness of man, God thus established holy history within secular history. But the chosen people neglected the light of special revelation given thereby.

<sup>1</sup> Gen. VI:6.

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Thus if God's plan was not to be a failure—and how could it be?—God was obliged to interfere with holy history as He had once done with general history. Thus the Son of God had to become flesh and to share historical life with man. The Old Covenant had been an historical process in which the spirit of God was intermittently active from time to time. In the New Covenant the Son of God became Himself an agent of history. Heaven and earth were thus linked together in a permanent historical process and history was directly tied up with eternity. Thereby the character of history, at least in the realm of holy history, was essentially transformed. Under the Old Covenant the history of the chosen people was earthly history, although it was under the guiding hand of God Who thus enabled man to earn eternal blessings. Through Christ the history of His chosen people became itself an act of divine salvation. Mankind need no longer wait for the actualisation of the promises of God. The Kingdom of God had come to them.

Hence the historical continuity which exists between Jewish and Christian religion or between the ancient world and the Christian church must not mislead us as to the basic change which has taken place in history. The primordial factor in the life of humanity is now a personal Being who is not stained by the influence of satanic powers. Moreover, the event by which mankind was enabled to continue its historical development was the crucifixion of Christ. Thus the relationship between the divine and the earthly agencies in history was paradoxically reversed. For by making the misery of the human race His own, the Son of God became the Lord of History. In Israel the process of holy history depended largely on the faithfulness with which the prophets communicated the revealed



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word of God to the congregation. Now, by means of His Spirit, Christ Himself is always present among men. Although He has ascended to Heaven He is nevertheless continually united with His disciples on earth. In His risen life they form His body in history, and thereby Jesus Christ Himself is made a direct agent of history.

### *2. The Church*

From the very beginning of His ministry Jesus conceived of His work in terms of an historical process. For (1) He never regarded belief as a merely individual activity; He thought of His followers as a community, forming the remnant of the people of God; (2) in Jesus' view the way to faith was one of listening to His words and accepting His example of true life. Hence His followers were bound to form an historical group in order to preserve the tradition of the New Way. But the purpose of God could not be carried out by the existing religious organisation of the Jewish people, because it was founded upon a misconception of the will of God. Hence it was quite natural that during His lifetime, Jesus should institute a new religious organisation—the church. The objections that were raised against the authenticity of Matthew XVI:18 during the nineteenth century were based upon dogmatical and political grounds rather than on exegetical considerations. The church was conceived by Jesus as the true assembly of God (q<sup>e</sup>hal Yahveh) in the midst of apostate Israel and the hostile world.

The church which was founded by Jesus was not a merely transcendent body in Heaven, but an historical organisation; and the various churches and sects which believe in Jesus

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Christ, the Son of God, and accept Him as their Saviour, are therefore the members of His body. As such, they endure the enmity which Satan feels for Him. Thus they suffer with Him, but also share His dominion over this world. Unlike the "righteous" of the Old Covenant, the "saints" of the New Covenant, that is, all believers, now rule over all inimical powers. In order, however, to take part in this dominion they have to pass through repentance (*metanoia*, new-mindedness) which means a complete change in their outlook on life. Believers are men who not only believe in a new truth, but who are also animated by Jesus Christ's spirit and thus His life is theirs. Their life is, therefore, one of power—although the victory has not yet been fully manifested. If Jesus had been one of the prophets only He would gradually have become superfluous. For in proportion as men became acquainted with His ideas and permeated by them, they would think in His way and might even improve on these ideas. Yet since the work of Christ is directed against the satanic powers He cannot be dispensed with as long as the foe of mankind has not been entirely annihilated.

In the service of God's purpose the function of the church consists in bearing public witness to the work of Christ and thus calling forth praise to God. This is done by the believers acknowledging Christ as their Lord, and thereby testifying to the supra-natural character of history, and also by the content of their belief, the unheard-of sacrificial love of God as shown in Jesus Christ. Thus the church is the continuation in history of the life of Jesus Christ, the risen Lord. In view of the many shortcomings, sins and crimes committed by the church or its members, this statement may seem to be a gross



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exaggeration and even a blasphemy. It is, however, true, if only we keep two facts in mind: (1) We are not ourselves Jesus Christs, but only the earthly body of our risen Lord. Nor is the activity of the clergy and, above all, of the Pope, the vicarious life of the risen Christ, as the Roman church teaches. For while He has life of Himself, ours is imparted to us by Him. Therefore no new sacrifice is made in our worship besides that which was once offered to God at Calvary. Moreover the Roman doctrine practically denies the activity of Christ's Holy Spirit in the church by confining it to the power inherent in the institution of episcopacy.

And a similar lack of reverence for the work which the Holy Spirit operates in the body of Christ on earth is shown by those who regard the Bible as the only legacy of Christ. We cannot separate the word of Christ from His body, for it was spoken and entrusted to the fellowship of His believers. As the New Testament teaches, and church history has copiously demonstrated, the Bible is not effective by itself, but only through the work of interpretation which the Holy Ghost brings about in the fellowship of the believers. Finally the reality of the body of Christ is denied by those who seek to rely individually upon the Holy Spirit and thereby make an abstraction both of the visible organisation of the church and of its historical tradition.

(2) The church shares with its Lord His two natures: the divine, which manifests itself in the church's power of truth as well as in the numerous gifts of the Holy Ghost; and His human nature, as a result of which it is subject to growth, and to the laws of historical development, and thus also to tribulations.

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To modern mentality, which has been formed by the atomistic outlook of rationalism, it is difficult to conceive of the church primarily as a supra-natural unity; but unless we acknowledge this fact, we shall not be able to understand the history of the church.

### B. THE CHURCH, CENTER OF HISTORY

#### 1. *The Influence of the Church*

By making the church His body on earth Jesus Christ has given it the central place in history. That is to say: the church is that empirical factor in history around which all other factors revolve, and it is the activity of the church which directs universal history. This can be seen by two facts: (a) every historical factor that comes into contact with the church is either utilised for its upbuilding, or rejected and thereby doomed to perdition; and (b) the church has laid the foundations of western civilisation.

##### *(a) Utilising the Past*

We have shown how Jesus' supra-natural power was disclosed by the way in which He made use of the three great historical movements of His time for the spread of His gospel and the upbuilding of His church. Yet this process was not confined to early Christianity and the Mediterranean world. Wherever, through the ages, the message of Christ was proclaimed, the historical situation which it confronted was made an opportunity to demonstrate the power of Christ. The church is never merely passive in history. Many of the attainments of secular history were adopted by the church and reached



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their perfection when they were transformed for Christian use. When the Gospel was brought to Syria, Ireland or Germany, for example, elements of the national and social culture of these countries were embodied in the tradition of the church. Thus they helped to enrich and deepen its message and its work. Similar developments are taking place today in China, India and Africa, and in each case it is not only the new national church which profits from such an amalgamation; the church universal receives new stimuli thereby, knowledge of new methods, new ideas and new helpers. In other cases secular movements influence the imagination or the will of individual Christians and thereby contribute to the rise of new Christian movements. Think, for example, of the colonial imperialism of the nineteenth century which aroused new missionary enthusiasm and activity, or even of modern atheism and secularism which promote in the church awareness of its indolence and a deeper understanding of the idea of unreserved personal surrender and of uncompromising belief in Jesus Christ.

Thus all the religions and civilisations of the world converge towards Christianity. This process must not, however, be interpreted as though all religions were of the same value as Christianity. By adopting elements of the past the church invariably transforms them. The history of religions is a particularly interesting instance of the eternal truth that many things are useful, but one only is needed. Thus, mystical experiences, sacramental practices, religious speculations of other religions have contributed and still contribute to the spiritual growth of the church. But it is by the one eternal and unchangeable Gospel of Christ that the church determines how

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far and in what way use can be made of the good elements contained in other religions. This explains the fact that there are many different national types of Christianity; but what makes them Christian is the witness they bear to Jesus Christ, not the way in which they express it.

By this process of selection Christ preserves the vitality of His body on earth and fosters its growth. The church adjusts itself constantly to changing conditions without thereby losing its identity. These adjustments are not easy procedures. For unlike Jewish religion the church is not based upon a dead historical past but lives by the power of the living Lord. Hence it cannot know in advance what a new situation will mean to it, nor can it act according to a program which has been adopted because of its apparent usefulness or feasibility.

Moreover, the militant character of Christ's activity results in conflicts with social, cultural or political powers of the surrounding world every time the church enters into a new historical situation. It was, indeed, not surprising that the church had to battle with innumerable heresies in the first centuries of its existence and that similar situations should occur, when in the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries great changes in cultural and political life again took place. It is God's will that heresies shall arise; for the process of adjustment shall be man's own work, not merely the automatic outcome of the working of social and cultural factors. Heretical movements compel the church to re-think its position and to take a deliberate stand.

Similarly the adaptation to new cultural and political conditions must be such that no essential element of the Gospel is thereby lost. There has always been a danger of the church's



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taking the easiest road and thus compromising with the world. But while there are good elements in all civilisations and in all social and political systems, not everything in them is good. Consequently when the church makes selections from them, it thereby discriminates against all the rest, and hence meets with resistance on the part of the powers of the past. By this enmity the church is enabled to recognise, however, how far it can proceed in the process of adaptation without disloyalty to Christ. Thus the church had to learn to distinguish, for example, between the element of God-given authority as incorporated in the Roman Empire, and its self-assertiveness. By the former of these factors the Empire helped to shape the organisation of the church; by the latter it obliged the church to fight this and all similar types of imperialism—the worship of the Emperor or State—as blasphemous infringements upon the prerogatives of Christ. Analogous developments came to pass when Christianity was confronted with Neo-Platonism (a comprehensive view of the universe, but without a Creator or Redeemer), Averroism (an organic connection between theology and philosophy, but without recognition of the indispensability of special revelation), the Humanism of the sixteenth and seventeenth century (a synthesis between religion and civilisation, but by a denial of the reality of sin), the French revolution (a church detached from class-interests, but controlled by the state) or modern socialism (a radical protest against social injustice, but in an entirely secular society). In these and similar situations there was danger that the church should become envious of the apparent success of a powerful rival and therefore partly adopt its methods or views in order to equal it. This was done, for example, by heretical Neo-

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Platonism (Origen), the Latin Averroists of the thirteenth century, the Humanism of the Jesuits in the sixteenth century, the Gallican clergy during the French revolution, the Religious Socialists and the "German Christians" in our days.

In other cases God by destroying an existing system of civilisation compels the church to make a selection of those cultural attainments which are worthy to survive. The church is thus under obligation to preserve those which can be used as means for the propagation of the Gospel. Such situations occurred, for example, after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in the fifth century, or that of the Eastern Empire in Syria and Mesopotamia in the sixth and seventh centuries.

### *(b) Formation of the Western World*

Christ utilises the benefits of this world not only for the upbuilding of His church, but also for the transformation of the whole historical life of mankind. So basic and so universal has been His influence that western mankind numbers the years by their distance from the date of His birth. People thereby acknowledge the Incarnation as the beginning of a new era, as the fact which divides history into two entirely different periods. Other nations and religions do not know such a division of history. They date events from a decisive moment which gave birth to their present history, and all that has taken place before it is not regarded as history at all, but merely as prehistory. The fact that we count the years B.C., as well, indicates that every event is related historically to Christ, however distant from Him it may be in place and in time. Our chronological system points to the fundamental difference of



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the two ages. The years before Him prepared for His coming; historical achievements and events after Him are materials for His transforming activity.

The early church did not think originally of gaining decisive influence over civilisation and political life. There was, on the contrary, a remarkable tendency among the first Christians to keep aloof from the sins of this world, and only reluctantly did they take part in its activities. Yet on the other hand it was the very will of Christ, as operative in His body, which gradually made the church the most important factor of historical life. The idea of a church which should permeate the whole world as a witness to Christ's saving power, necessarily implied public activity and participation in the life of the world. Since Christianity was a religion in which a divine message held a central place, contact with this world was to begin in the realm of thought (St. Paul, St. John the Evangelist, the Apologists). But growth of the local churches made it necessary for them to have special buildings, and thus architecture and art came into the orbit of the new religion; the numerical increase of congregations rendered problems of administration and church policy urgent, and thereby led into the sphere of political theory.

Nevertheless it was not until the fourth century that the church recognised that it had a direct responsibility for the whole world and therefore had to care not only for Christlike life within its own institutions, but also for the right kind of life outside its proper field of activity. During the fourth and fifth centuries it became increasingly manifest that the ancient pagan civilisation lacked sufficient vitality to continue to live by its own strength. In those days people turned their eyes

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towards the church to seek a panacea. For this body was then the only center of moral, religious and cultural life. How wide was the gulf that separated the Fathers of the church from contemporary philosophers! They excelled them in achievements and in number, and were full of new problems. While it may be conceded that some of their pagan contemporaries equalled them in character, none surpassed them in moral vitality and strength of mind. The revival of ancient civilisation which took place in the fourth and fifth centuries was due to Christian influences. It was the Christian clergy and monks who gradually brought about a complete transformation of ancient civilisation in the Eastern Mediterranean. They inspired their contemporaries with high ideals, and thus helped to eliminate unsuitable elements of former civilisations and to remould the rest. The result was Byzantine civilisation which survived clear to the fifteenth century when it finally collapsed under the impact of the Turks.

In the West the process was halted prematurely by the invasion of the barbarians. There the last of pagan civilisation vanished, together with the ancient Roman Empire, when the Teutonic tribes enveloped the ancient world in a cloud of disorder and barbarism. The Arabs accomplished the same work in the East and on the coast of North Africa. The meaning of life, which for a long time had appeared highly questionable to non-Christians, seemed to vanish completely under those dreadful catastrophes. The only men who dared preserve the legacy of antiquity were monks and bishops. They could do so because they had put all their trust in an eternal Lord. Hence their faith and determination could not be shaken by the vicissitudes of turbulent history.



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There is at present a tendency to ascribe the development of the modern western world to the Teutonic tribes and to point to the apparent marks of their racial genius. Yet what would these tribes have been without the church? They were barbarians who, after having destroyed the Roman Empire and its civilisation, were unable to build up anything new in its place. It suffices to look at the rapid process of cultural, political, social and religious decay in Franconia under the reign of the Merovingian Kings, once the rich Gallo-Roman heritage had been destroyed. The link which connects antiquity with the ancient world is the church. The monasteries in Ireland preserved the treasures of Greek and Roman civilisation and handed them down to the Germanic tribes together with the Christian religion. The sees of the bishops in Gaul were the strongholds of political order and administration in those dark days when the Norsemen and the Arabs devastated the western countries and kings and princes were powerless and unable to effectively oppose them. What has been interpreted as the church's will for dominion—its incessant claim to promote the right administration, education and moral life of the nations—was in fact the inborn sense of responsibility which it felt for the world. It was by this Christian education, rather than by their national genius, that the Teutonic tribes were enabled to initiate a new period in history and to exercise such decisive influence upon the genesis of modern Europe. Apart from the church these tribes were a mere force for destruction in the ancient world. Christianity taught them the true values of life and thus made them capable of contributing their special gifts to the development of mankind.

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### *(c) Results of Church History*

What we call the western world is unthinkable apart from the work done by the church. There is no department of life where its penetration and lasting effects are not found. It is frequently argued that modern civilisation, as distinct from that of the middle ages, is based upon the heritage of antiquity as rediscovered in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and has therefore no connection with Christianity. But the nations of the West would not have been able at the end of the middle ages to appropriate the remainders of the Greco-Roman world to themselves were it not that Christianity and the church had trained their mental faculties and prepared their hearts and wills for this particular outlook.

Even a summary enumeration of all the lasting results of Christian civilisation would transcend the purpose of this volume. It suffices to mention some which are particularly outstanding or of special importance.

#### *(1) Philosophy*

Most histories of philosophy ignore the contribution which Christianity has made to the development of modern philosophy, or at least overlook the complete change which Christian thinking has brought about in the realm of theoretical thought. By starting from the revealed truth the great Christian thinkers of all ages have disturbed the self-complacency of philosophy and the belief in its self-sufficiency. To give only a few instances: St. Augustine replaced the ancient conception of history by the Biblical idea of a dynamic process which leads to a final consummation in judgment or eternal blessing. We sel-



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dom realise that neither the Germanic and the Slavic tribes nor the ancient world held a real idea of history. On the other hand we can say that any type of philosophy which does not take the problem of history and the historical nature of man seriously, must certainly be mistaken, because its views neglect one of the basic elements of human existence.

Another important and far-reaching impulse was given by Christian thinkers to philosophical anthropology. Starting from the idea of personal salvation, these men discovered the Ego and its problems. Antiquity was ignorant of its nature. People then spoke of the soul or of the individual, but they overlooked the fact that each human individual has a moral responsibility towards the rest of the world. Moreover, it was discovered that human individuals are not mere individualisations of an absolute mind, but rather earthly beings who are able to make an individual response to the call of God. By holding this view St. Paul and St. Augustine became the teachers of modern psychology and philosophy. Apart from their preparatory work, Descartes' and Kant's ideas of man are inconceivable. The great progress of modern philosophy is due to the impulse of men whose thoughts were entirely founded upon the New Testament, for example Origen, St. Augustine, Bonaventura, St. Thomas Aquinas, Luther, Pascal, Jakob Boehme, Kierkegaard. They criticised relentlessly the shortcomings of merely rationalistic philosophy and compelled the philosophers to test their objections. It has never been possible to offer alternative solutions to the problems raised by these men, more satisfactory than theirs. Thus, for example, St. Augustine introduced the problems of freedom, responsibility, original sin, the relation between the world and the

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Kingdom of God, the distinction between absolute and relative laws of nature; Luther pointed to the difference between belief, religion and faith, he elucidated the human situation by referring to its basic insecurity, and emphasised the paramount power of the human soul. Pascal urged philosophers to distinguish between the logic of the heart and that of the understanding, indicated the absurdity of unbelief, and fixed the rights and limits of doubt; Kierkegaard dealt with contemporaneity, the correlation of time and eternity, existential thinking.

### (2) *Moral Life*

Christianity substituted the idea of constructive and sympathetic brotherhood for the abstract respect for human personality, which represented the climax of ancient moral thought. This change led to the comprehensive care of all kinds of needy people. They were regarded as God's children who thereby had a moral claim upon others' help. No longer were they left to the good will of some individual. The family was discovered as a moral unit on its own merits, independent of its function in economic and social life and of the ties of clans and social groups. Sexual life was raised to the realm of moral relationship, it was no longer interpreted as a merely natural function. The idea of Christ's being the Bridegroom of the Church ennobled the relations between the sexes. Although sexual purity was regarded as a virtue by the Germanic tribes, this evaluation did not affect the subordinate rôle of the woman. The Christian conception of sex resulted in belief in the dignity of the other sex, respect for, and finally emancipation of women.



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Furthermore, while antiquity was unable to find a satisfactory counter-weight to its anarchic conception of freedom, and therefore wavered between civil war and tyranny, Christianity taught that true freedom was coupled with responsibility. Thereby it attained to a new idea of self-discipline. Limitations which were imposed upon one's vitality were no longer necessarily and indiscriminately felt as frustrations. Men learned to use them as impulses to a higher type of life, and therefore to accept them voluntarily. The mediaeval monk and knight represent types of life which antiquity was not only ignorant about, but was also unable to conceive of or produce. The new idea of brotherhood in Christ transformed the ancient idea of society. The respect for laws was supplemented by the will to serve the community and its members. Mankind was conceived of as a unity notwithstanding the differences of races and nations. Whereas even the highest types of men in the ancient world never transcended the distinction between cultured (or wise) men and barbarians, Christianity believed in the oneness of all men. By this idea equality before the law and equal care for the needs of all individuals were secured. Physical superiority was no longer recognised as a legal or moral title; cruelty towards the feeble—women, children and even animals—was condemned and effectively prevented. When both the social groups of the ancient world and the tribal organisations of the Germanic people had broken down in the upheaval of the dark ages, it was the church that created new forms of community life. Moreover, by its charitable works it first drew attention to certain social evils—immorality and lack of hygiene in prisons, the misery of slums, the fate of lepers, epileptics, psychopathics—until finally the social con-

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science regarded it as a public obligation to care for people under such conditions.

In political life the church created a new conception of the state by the example of its own organisation and administration. While it cannot be denied that there have been bishops who were animated by the will for dominion, the institution of episcopacy nevertheless owes its origin and growth to the fact that the earliest leaders of the church regarded the church as a commonwealth entrusted to them rather than as their property or domain; and this idea of stewardship led directly to the creation of western officialdom. While in the ancient world officials regarded their job as an opportunity to exploit the citizens, they learned from the bishops that they must care for them and be their servants. Later on, at the end of the middle ages, this process led to the modern idea of the state as an institution, detached both from the dynastic interests of the ruler and the collective will of the people. Hence the modern state is conceived of as a good in itself, of which the ruler is the trustee, which is to be used for the sake alike of present and future generations.

In national life the church was the first to acknowledge the legitimate claim for a national language. What had been a mere fact then became a divine right. Ancient philosophy did not recognise the metaphysical significance of national languages. By giving religious instruction in the vernacular tongue to each people, the church introduced the elements of higher civilisation into national life and thus enabled the nations of the West to build up national cultures. Moreover, by means of this organic connection of national life with Christianity the nations inherited from the church the idea of



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a mission. National feeling and nationalism had been in existence in the ancient world. But the idea of a national mission could be conceived of only when the nations were given an opportunity of standing for something beyond their respective peculiarities. This combination occurred first in Charlemagne's Empire, and subsequently in the national kingdoms of Europe. There it was conceived of as the nation's obligation to defend the Christian faith and to fight for its propagation among the heathen. Even Islam adopted it from Christianity, stressing particularly the element of election. In the modern western world the idea was secularised and transformed into colonial imperialism. In this secularised form it was brought to the East, for example, to Japan. But its Christian origin is still to be seen in its religious connotations.

Furthermore, the Christian idea of the common weal and of general responsibility gave rise in mediaeval Britain to the western idea of democracy, which was so typically different from the ancient idea of democracy as revived in the French revolution. The Christian conception of democracy has become so strong in the modern world that even modern dictators do not dare to assume the attitude of the ancient tyrants. They try to maintain, at least externally, the appearance of general political responsibility on the part of the citizens.

Finally, we mention the attitude towards war. Although the church has not been able to eradicate the evil of war from political life, it has at least transformed it into a moral problem. Nations no longer dare to admit that they wage wars merely for selfish ends. They try at least to justify them morally, and accept, at least theoretically, certain restrictions in the methods of warfare. However small these changes may

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be from the material point of view, this development shows, nevertheless, that Christianity has succeeded in bringing nations to the recognition of the moral issue involved in warfare.

### (3) *Civilisation*

The Christian conception of faith, as based upon the revelation of God, was bound to lead to the laying of special emphasis upon instruction: everyone should be able to take part in public worship and to understand the mysteries of faith. In sacramental or mystical religions no such need exists, and thus the majority of the people who practice these religions are illiterate. The church found itself under the necessity—particularly after the collapse of ancient civilisation—of providing schools and means of learning. Higher schools and universities have their roots in the schools of the cathedrals and monasteries. The Reformers urged the establishment of public schools throughout the country, and on the Continent Bible teaching and instruction in the Catechism were the germs of the elementary school system. Similarly in Wales it was by the Sunday School Movement, originally destined for merely religious purposes, that Thomas Charles and his friends promoted the foundations of primary schools. The influence which Christianity had upon the formation of what we call the “Western Mind” can hardly be overrated. The church taught the Westerner to work methodically. In his conception of monastic life, St. Benedict insisted on the Christian’s obligation to do useful work. A Christian not only has no right to be idle, it is his appointed task to transform this world from its existence as mere nature into one of man’s own making.

Moreover, it was Christianity that gave the element of rest-



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lessness to the human soul. As St. Augustine said: "Our heart is restless, until it rests in Thee." This restlessness was caused by the awareness of the promises which God had given to His children, and by which the meaning of life was shifted from the present to the future. Because of their comprehensive character this striving after promised ends could not be confined to the properly religious sphere. It transformed the whole personality. It is, however, to be distinguished from the natural unrest of the Germans for example; for by this unrest they were incited to migrations, piracy, and pleasure in destruction. It is the Christian element of restlessness which has brought about that continuous progress in science and philosophy which characterises the western world, as well as that type of activity which incessantly strives towards perfection, never acquiescing in achievements already made.

This development was made possible by the new spirit of initiative with which Christianity imbued its followers. Its incentives were not emotional outbursts, or greed, or ambition, but the belief in Divine Providence. On this basis it seemed to be useful and justifiable to contrive great enterprises for many years to come. The belief in a divine purpose underlying the whole world, moreover, prompted people to transform nature into a product of man's mind. For this kind of work Christianity developed the critical mind of modern man, which is something entirely different from the scepticism of antiquity. The new critical mind originated in the recognition that, as a result of satanic deceit, this world is not always, or necessarily, what it appears to be; therefore everything must be tested by certain sure standards. Whereas the ancient sceptic was self-centered and aimed at becoming a "wise man" supe-

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rior to his fellows, the modern critical mind has an interest in truth as truth, without personal considerations. Hence this quest for truth is coupled with the desire to disclose it to everyone.

Thus modern science itself, both in its motives and methods, rests upon Christian impulses.<sup>2</sup> The same is true of modern philology, which has its beginnings in Biblical philology, and of the comparative method which contributed so much to the growth of modern history, sociology, political science, philology, mythology.<sup>3</sup> These derive from the Christian idea—employed in such a masterly way by St. Augustine—that all creatures show certain analogies of rational structure because they have all been created by the same one Word of God. This was a conception of an analogy entirely different from that underlying magic and totemism. The mediaeval Augustinians, as well as Paracelsus and Jakob Boehme, interpreted this principle to the modern world.

### (4) *The Unity of Western Civilisation*

Western civilisation is based on the indefatigable activity of the church. The very fact that there is such a thing as a common western civilisation, notwithstanding the peculiar national cultures of the European peoples, bears witness to the unifying work that the Gospel message, the organisation of the universal church of the middle ages and its use of the Latin language, have brought about. Geographically Europe may be but an appendix to Asia, but it is a unity spiritually, whereas

<sup>2</sup>-Whitehead, Alfred N., *Science and the Modern World*, Chap. I; M. B. Foster, in *Mind*, October, 1934.

<sup>3</sup> For its significance see: Freeman, Edward A., *Historical Essays*, III, p. 301.



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Asia still harbors a variety of rival civilisations. Consequently the inhabitants of Asia lack that feeling of kinship which Europeans have for one another. In our days people try to treat Christianity as an incidental ingredient in western civilisation which they think they can easily dispense with. But men cannot eliminate what is organically united with this civilisation without destroying the whole.

When western civilisation is brought to Africa or Asia, it goes there not as American, English, or German civilisation, but primarily as that of the western world, that is to say, as tinged by Christian religion. Thus, for example, the fact that the colored people still show a certain respect for the white race, although at the same time they distrust them and despise many of their habits, is due to the latent Christian element in western civilisation. Thereby it is clad with a certain dignity which imposes itself upon other races, even when they do not realise its nature and origin. This civilisation owes its superiority to its Christian foundations by which the shortcomings of its representatives are counterbalanced. That this interpretation of the facts is true can be seen, for example, by the detrimental effect which bad western films have, not only upon the native's respect for Europeans, but also and above all upon the esteem in which Asia and Africa hold Christianity. The lack of continence and the vices shown in these films form a powerful argument of anti-Christian propagandists against the work of Christian missions.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the church confronts the nations of Africa and Asia with a dilemma. Even those which possess a high culture must recognise that the civilisation of the West is superior to theirs and yet they experience

<sup>4</sup> *The East and West Review*, November 4, 1936, p. 298.

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this civilisation as a power of terrible disintegration. The only hope for them, nevertheless, is to turn from an external imitation of the West to the acceptance of its center, which is Christianity. Experience has already shown how tribes and nations who have done so, have been enabled to bring about a satisfactory synthesis of indigenous traditions and western civilisation, while others become an easy prey to the poisons of the West, because they lack a standard by which to measure what is wholesome and necessary in civilisation.

Since Christ has become the Lord of History, historical life can have no center apart from Him. Hence the situation of mankind without Christ is so tragic: it becomes necessarily chaotic, since it lacks a definite natural center. All the attempts to organise history, such as the League of Nations, world trade, western civilisation, for example, create but external coherence and therefore last for only a short time. With inescapable necessity all these organisations are destroyed by the centrifugal forces operative in their own midst. The history of the interrelations between Christianity and the world shows not only that Christ spoke the truth when He promised: "Behold I make all things new!", but also when He indicated the futility of secularism in the New Aeon: "Without me ye can do nothing!"



## CHAPTER VII

### THE LIVING CHRIST

ONE objection seems to arise almost of necessity from this survey of church history: does it really prove that Christ is the Lord of History? Must we not say that it testifies to the greatness and fertility of the impulse which He gave, and that it bears witness to the energy, ability and strength of Christianity and of the church rather than to a perpetual activity of its Founder? Such an interpretation would not penetrate, however, to the depth of the time process.

There are three phenomena in church history for which it is impossible for the rationalistic historian to furnish a satisfactory explanation and in which we see proofs that the church is the Body of Christ, and that His agency as the living Lord determines its destinies: (1) the miraculous growth of the church (2) the way in which Christian truth enforces issues and brings about judgment and (3) the wisdom displayed in the relationship between secular and holy history.

#### A. THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH

The church has grown constantly since the days of the apostles. Its rapid increase from mean and unknown beginnings to the world-wide position which it holds today, its stability in all crises and its duration through the ages count among the great miracles of history. But more marvelous even is the fact

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that God Himself has foretold through His prophets and apostles and through His Son, Jesus Christ, that it would develop to such an historically important position. It is true, there have been apostasies and setbacks, and it would be unrealistic to ignore the precarious situation in which the church now has to live in wide sections of our globe and the almost complete destruction of its organisation in Russia. But this fate was also foretold by God. If, therefore, people mock and slander the church because of its deficiencies and shortcomings, Christians will accept their reproaches full of shame, but not without hope. For the deficiencies of the church only prove the might of God Who works such marvelous things through such insufficient and feeble instruments. Moreover, at the very moment when the home countries of Christianity seem to abandon its truth, the heathen world shows amazing eagerness to listen to the Good News.

Viewed as a whole, church history is a process of growth, both numerically and in intensity. While it would be wrong to say that Christians in our days are more spiritual than those of the Apostolic Age, for example, it is, nevertheless, true that the long development of spiritual life has enabled us to have a deeper and more comprehensive insight into many aspects of God's revelation in Jesus Christ than had His first followers. This is no cause for boasting, for it is not the zeal of men, but the incessant work of Christ's Spirit which has wrought this result. But there is much reason for gratitude, because we can now speak so much more directly to each man's condition than could former generations. We seldom realise how advantageous it is for us to have a specifically Christian terminology, for example, while that of the early church,



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which was largely borrowed from Judaism and paganism, gave occasion for many misunderstandings. Moreover, because of the steadily increasing number of Christians, there have been more recipients of the special gifts of the Holy Ghost, and thus this world can be pervaded by the Christian spirit at so many more points than was the case in antiquity. Hence arises the great and wholesome influence which, for example, the monastic orders or the many small groups of "saints" in Protestantism had upon their contemporaries and by which they shaped history and national life. Even modern America still bears the visible marks of the Pilgrim Fathers, their directness, honesty and austerity, and their belief in God-given liberties.

If church history were but the work of man, then the process would not have lasted for so long a time, however clever or fanatical the members of the church might have been. For how great were the obstacles and internal handicaps with which the church had to fight! What beginnings! Unlearned, simple men, who during His lifetime often grossly misunderstood their Master, who deserted and denied Him in the dangers of His last hours. It needs an unusual psychology to explain their apostolic zeal by their superstitious belief in apparitions or by their moral enthusiasm. Moreover, they were not only Jews, but they also coupled their new message in an indissoluble way with the Old Testament, and thus had to overcome the anti-semitism of the ancient world in two ways. Furthermore, take the first congregations among the heathen, for the knowledge of which the Pauline Epistles furnish ample material: how manifold were their prejudices, how manifest their moral weakness, and how alluring the temptations to heresy and apostasy which beset them at every step!

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With the collapse of the Roman Empire, Christianity passed from one civilisation to another; its work had to be carried on by a group of nations which had almost nothing in common with the Mediterranean world. How easy it then was to lose all contact with its origins, as Buddhism did, for example, when it migrated from India to China and Japan. Instead, we see in Christian history a marvelous unity underlying the apparent disparity which exists between the ancient and the mediaeval church. How unfavorable were the circumstances under which the expansion of the church took place in the early middle ages! As a rule it was brought to heathen peoples by their enemies and in connection with warfare. Experience shows that it is more difficult to convert pagans to the gospel than to persuade the average Christian to rid himself of his allegiance. The fact that, nevertheless, the number of Christians constantly increased is the more surprising. Finally, let it be remembered how frequently Christianity has been scorned, persecuted and suppressed. But though defeated here and there, the Christian church has derived new energy, new zeal and new strength from every repulse, and every persecution of Christians has resulted in a rapid spread of their message. Nations may rebel against it and may kill the Christians, but they have never succeeded in silencing the Gospel.

The church, on the other hand, has very seldom used violence for the propagation of the Gospel, because it believes in the irresistible power of persuasion. There have been cases where, in the interest of pure truth, it made use of the armed force of its supporters, particularly in order to suppress heresies, but for a long time it has realised that such methods were both deplorable and unsuccessful.



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But what perplexes the non-Christian—and also many Christians—is the fact that as a rule God does not seem to be able to win the hearts of mighty, wealthy or wise men. Thus some people hold that Christian belief is but the illusory comfort of those who are deprived of the good things of life. Their enthusiasm would then be the fanaticism of men who fight for their illusions, because disillusionment would throw them into complete despair. But the amazing thing is that those who believe in Christ not only find comfort, but also are enabled by God to perform admirable actions and to surpass the achievements of kings, philosophers or bankers. The church is the work of twelve men whose names contemporary secular historians did not even deem worthy of mention. Similarly the Bible was written by people who had no literary education, and yet its circulation surpasses that of any other book. It is read by hundreds of millions, while even the finest and profoundest works of ancient literature are known to restricted circles only. How many unknown and simple men, who had no share in the power or wealth of the earth, have become great saints who had greater influence upon their contemporaries and on succeeding generations than kings and philosophers! For whereas philosophers have sometimes succeeded in keeping people within the frame of goodness, the saints have been able to change thousands of lives.

This triumph of the Good News cannot be explained by human factors such as, for example, the marvelous achievements of Christian theologians, the moral purity of the saints or the skilful policy of church leaders. For the amazing fact cannot be denied that Christianity was particularly successful where the moral strength, high learning and all the well-elab-

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orated programs of its leaders failed, and where feeble men and women, whose shortcomings and incapacities were evident, ventured to serve its cause. This does not mean that human greatness and zeal are useless in God's service, or that one must be uncultured or morally weak in order to become God's fellow-worker. But the facts prove that the primary agent in church history is Jesus Christ Himself. What makes Christianity so attractive to the pagan world is the love which Christ manifestly shows for His followers rather than their deeds and qualities. The gentiles realise that beyond moral strength and spiritual elation they will find in Christ redemption and salvation. To us, the great majority of whom are born and brought up in a Christian environment, the offer of Christ's love is so much a matter of course that we are tempted to make light of it. Only those who temporarily or constantly have to live in non-Christian surroundings realise what it means to be without these good gifts, which, through the spiritual life of His followers and the means of grace of His Church, Christ offers to us.

How great must be the power of Christ, since He is able not only to attract people of all kinds and conditions, but also to incite them to believe in the fatherly love of God and to make the greatest sacrifices for His sake. If people believed in Him for selfish reasons, they would soon abandon Him, since He does not grant immediate relief from pain and need, nor does He release men to unrestricted liberty, but rather claims their hearts and wills for His purposes. His strength is that of His love. Whoever has felt it cannot help loving Him. It is Christ's love which makes the sceptic strong in faith and



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strengthens the moral stamina of the feeble,<sup>1</sup> it is this indefatigable love which our Lord has for us which so constrains the persecutors of His Body that finally they feel compelled to join it. It is this same love which provides for the needs of His followers beyond their expectations. To mention only one instance: When St. Francis and St. Dominic founded their orders they vowed poverty, and relied entirely on the Lord's promises that He would grant His followers' requests. Is it not an almost unbelievable fact that only a generation after their foundation these orders had become so wealthy that they had to fight against the temptations of abundance?

It is Christ Who, through the church, makes Himself Lord of History, and He succeeds in His endeavors because by His love He becomes master of human hearts.

All great human achievements can be devaluated either by achievements of a superior degree or by a derogatory interpretation; all use of force will invite the resistance of the oppressed. Love alone is irresistible: one can flee it but not combat it.

### B. THE POWER OF CHRIST'S TRUTH

The second proof which we can proffer for the fact that Jesus Christ Himself is active in church history, is the power of Christian truth. If the future of Christianity depended exclusively on the fact that it possessed the Bible, then the Christian religion would share the fate of other great religions and philosophical systems which in the course of history were transformed beyond cognisance. Not so the Christian religion.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. XI:34.

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For, independently of what theologians have tried to make of the Gospel, Christ's Spirit uses the Bible as His instrument to speak the Divine Word directly to the hearts of men. Thus He turns them from human opinions back to the source of Truth itself, the person of our Redeemer. By this direct operation of His Truth, Christ performs a twofold function in history: (a) He enforces His issues upon the minds of men, and (b) He makes Himself the Judge of men.

### *1. Enforcing His Issues*

The truth of God is contained in the Bible; but Jesus showed that the Jews were mistaken when for this reason they identified the Bible with the Word of God. God speaks to us whenever His Holy Spirit illumines the content of the Bible by the light of experience and holy history; and those who reject the light of the Spirit do not receive the divine truth itself in exchange, but rather obscure it by their own interpretation of the Bible. God Himself provides special means by which His Church is helped to remain on the path of pure truth. It is true that for His purpose He acts frequently in a paradoxical way which is unintelligible to the unbeliever. He allows heresies, for example, to arise from time to time in Christianity. It is of the nature of heresies to contradict the voice of truth in the church by one-sidedly over-emphasising doctrines held by the church at a certain time. By their fanaticism, the heretics make manifest the principles underlying their views. While a certain understanding of these doctrines up to a certain point seemed to be compatible with true faith, or at least harmless, its true nature is now revealed, and the church is thus enabled to exactly define the orthodox position.



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The same holds true for practical questions. There is always in man a tendency towards complacency and love of ease, and thus he likes to reason that there exists a large neutral realm between specifically Christian and outspokenly non-Christian activities. But every attempt to delimit the realm of the "natural" or of the "adiaphora" is based upon a wrong principle of division. There can be no neutral sphere in human life, it lives either by the power of Christ, or under the dominion of Satan. To make this clear to His church or to individual Christians, a situation which seemed to be neutral is sometimes permitted by God to develop so that its inner tendency comes to light.

There have also been numerous instances in holy history when the chosen people were tempted to give way to the attraction of developments in the surrounding world which seemed to allow an easier way of life or a world-view more directly appealing to sense experience and natural feeling than traditional Christianity. These dangers were overcome, not by means of theoretical refutations, but by events and facts by which God revealed His true nature in an unmistakable way; in ancient Israel, for example, by the captivity in Babylon and the return of the remnant to Jerusalem; in early Christianity, by the courage of the martyrs, the honesty and the zeal of the clergy, the austerity of life in early monasticism, and by the spiritual fruit which such attitudes bore in the life and theology of the church. Similarly the danger of Neo-platonism and the terrors of the migrating barbarian tribes were overcome by the Christian practice of preaching sin, claiming confession and announcing God's forgiveness. Also, the conflict between church and empire in the Middle Ages was originally meant to

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make evident the spiritual superiority of the church. The German Emperor, Henry IV, for example, may have thought he was fighting against the encroachments of the papacy, but his fight was primarily an attempt of the secular power to get rid of the control of its spiritual superior. Hence Gregory VII rightly blamed the Emperor's conceit (*superbia*) as the main root of the conflict, and the Emperor's humiliation was the divine means by which the spiritual superiority of the church was given visible expression for all ages. In later years, on the other hand, the desire of the Popes to identify the church with themselves called forth the protest of the secular and spiritual powers within the church. This process finally resulted in the Reformation. Thereby God made clear factually that the authority of the church rested primarily with the means of grace, and indirectly only with the men who administered it.

Thus by means of heresies and conflicts Christ not only delivers Christianity from actual dangers but also destroys opposing and endangering movements. But this does not mean that difficulties and persecutions, as such, will lead a church back to truth and fullness of life. It is a very dangerous delusion on the part of certain Protestant leaders in our day to believe that there would be a revival in their churches if only they had to endure the persecutions of certain continental churches. Only those who believe in Christ and who therefore utilise such situations and events as God-given opportunities will derive blessing from them. The rest will simply perish, as the fate of so many churches in the Near East has demonstrated.

We have already shown that Christ's power extends beyond holy history. He transforms the non-Christian world as soon



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as it comes into historical contact with Him. Through His church He confronts people with His truth. In this process of inter-relation between the church and the world, Christian factors will not be submerged, but rather take the lead. In the New Aeon, Christ enforces His issues everywhere. Man naturally dislikes clear issues of fundamental significance, but Christ does not allow neutrality in respect to His work. As He says, "He who is not with me is against me," for willy-nilly such a man is with the Prince of this World. Christ has definitely destroyed the autonomy of history. He compels people to profess openly with whom they side. What at first sight seem to be but cultural, social or political issues which are decided upon by considerations of expediency, imply a moral and spiritual principle.

Moreover, whenever Christ enters into the history of a nation or into a new realm of national life, people are no longer at liberty to conceive of their problems and obligations at their own pleasure. He imposes His truths upon men. They may reject Him, but they can no longer avoid discussing the problems in the way He has stated them. Wherever Christ has made His appearance mankind can no longer be indifferent with regard to the question: What is truth? So powerful is He that people have to pretend that Christianity is untrue, when they do not want to be troubled by the problem of truth. Furthermore, where Christ is present men are deprived of the possibility of creating anything entirely new. In some way everything must then be related to Him. Nietzsche, for example, aimed at an entirely new conception of life. But all his efforts only led to the conception of an ideal by which the traditional Christian scale of values was reversed. Notwithstanding his

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genius he was not able to develop this conception from an entirely new and original basis. Even the atheism and irreligion of our contemporaries is, therefore, no original creation. It derives all its strength from the fight against its bitterly hated foe, namely, the Christian religion. Apart from this hostility it is so poor in content that it would hardly attract any followers. This is the reason why the Anti-God Movement in Russia, for example, has to arrange persecutions of Christians periodically in order to inflame the vanishing zeal of its followers.

Were it not so tragically pathetic it would be almost humorous to notice to what extent the anti-Christian and anti-religious movements of modern times rest upon Christian presuppositions. Their representatives, it is true, are usually so ignorant of history that they take as the outcome of natural reason the things they admire in western civilisation, whereas, as has been shown, they are deeply rooted in Christian belief and have been worked out by the church. Bolshevism, for example, presupposes Christian sociology which has prepared its communistic ideals. Modern anti-Christianity and secularism is therefore the absurd attempt to get rid of Christianity and the churches, while clinging to such achievements of Christian civilisation as the idea of an absolute moral obligation, or the postulates of the positively spiritual character of the world and life and of social responsibility.

### *2. Christ Judging the World*

Those who attack the church or Christianity must soon realise that their own existence is at stake in this conflict. For when the Lord manifests His truth He makes it clear at the



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same time that those who oppose Him and His truth are not in the truth and therefore their life lacks true meaning. Thus the disclosure of Christ's truth becomes the judgment of the world.

The divine judgment does not aim primarily at punishment as does human judgment, but rather at the manifestation of the fact that man without Christ is a liar.<sup>2</sup> In this way Christ promotes the cause of His believers in their conflicts with the opponents of faith. Those, for example, who tried to refute Christianity not only failed eventually in their endeavors, but helped to promote the advance of the Gospel, because the difference between their insufficiencies and Christ's greatness soon became evident. Similarly, persecutions of Christians always contribute in the long run to the contempt of the persecutors. But rather than accept the obvious verdict of Christ, men reject and oppose it and deny its right, because they naturally hate the manifestation of their untruth, for they feel that their lives and activities would be doomed to evanescence and futility if they were really liars. Yet no appeal is possible against the verdict of the divine judge. It is definite. Whatever by the searchlight of God's truth has been disclosed as erroneous or untrue fades away and can never be brought to life again.

Moreover, even in situations where confrontation with Christ manifests some relative truth, it is in an event, in a system of thought, or in certain actions, the revealed Word of Christ which determines the significance which they are to have for future history. Hence whatever is made directly subservient to Christ's purposes thereby becomes of absolute

<sup>2</sup> Rom. III:4; I John II:4, 22; V:10.

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importance. The Old Testament, for example, which was of limited moment only, when it was merely the divine book of the Jews, became the Word of God for the whole of mankind when it was incorporated into the Christian Bible. So, many personalities of His time who are entirely ordinary people but who met Jesus, live in the memory of mankind; for example, the disciples, the woman who anointed Him in Simon's house, or Pontius Pilate.

Because the events through which Christ reveals Himself are of primary order, the constituent factors of secular history have no longer any absolute significance for the historical process. Their true meaning now derives from the fact that virtually or actually they are material or instruments for the up-building of Christ's kingdom. This evaluation subverts the traditional one in most instances. In the eyes of Roman authorities and historians the crucifixion of Jesus, for example, was not worth remembering. Today, on the contrary, many seemingly great deeds of the past which were reported by ancient writers, are of merely archaeological interest. Christ's interferences with history have made it plain that historical significance is to be measured by the amount of divine truth disclosed in an event rather than by the physical or mental energy displayed in it or the social standing of its agents.

That it is Christ Himself, however, and not an abstract truth only, which underlies history can be seen from the fact that God does not leave the heathen and the unbelievers to themselves when He has judged them by His truth. The seeking and redeeming love of Christ is manifest in all contacts between the church and non-Christians. Christ both preserves His elect in the truth, and educates the rest for the truth. He



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unmasks the futility of their aspirations and the worthlessness of their works. But since He meets them in a concrete way He offers them at the same time an opportunity for new and better growth. Even in cases where people did not accept the Christian truth which was addressed to them, they were, nevertheless, by its very presence enabled to avoid some gross errors into which they would otherwise have fallen. The most conspicuous instance in this respect is Mohammed. His genuine Arabian paganism would never have been able to offer a basis for a world-wide movement were it not for its contact with Judaism and Christianity.

### C. THE WISDOM OF CHRIST

A further proof of the fact that Jesus Christ Himself is at work in church history is to be seen in the wisdom by which historical events are governed. Mythical terms, such as "law of evolution," "the cunning of the idea," (Hegel) or "historical necessity" are but words meant to disguise the ignorance and perplexity of the historian. If only he tried to analyse them he would find himself driven back to the idea of a personal God working exactly in the way that Jesus Christ works. Our Saviour so arranges history as to serve as an education for his followers. Their function is to be His witnesses. But for this purpose it is necessary that at each period of church history His believers should have at their disposal the spiritual gifts and weapons which are required for their appointed task. To this end Christ makes secular history subservient to holy history, and thereby supplies His followers with those benefits which will be particularly helpful in their situation.

It is sufficient to give some conspicuous instances from

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church history which will prove the truth of this assertion. One of the most interesting ones is the function which Islam played in Christ's plans. When the early church had relapsed into the mistakes of an abstract concept of God on the one hand, and the belief in political power on the other, Islam made its appearance. It was a religion which believed in Jesus of Nazareth, but not in His Messiahship, which was monotheistic and eschatological, but ignorant of the mercy by which God forgives sins. It also had a strong appeal to man's moral will based on the belief in his natural perfectibility. The Eastern Church at that time was far more advanced theologically than that of the West, but, on the other hand, it was alienated from its essence by its close connection with the political administration and civilisation of the Eastern Roman Empire. Hence it was the will of God that it should be disabled by the impact of the Arabs. Large portions of it succumbed to the lure of the new religion, which seemed to be a logical development and simplification of what was then held to be the Christian religion, and the rest was paralysed. Thus the responsibility for the growth of the church was left to the West, which, in those centuries, however, was handicapped by the weight of barbarism.

For the growth of genuinely Christian civilisation this catastrophe was obviously necessary. Ancient civilisation which had already vanished in the West, should then perish in the East as well so that the fundamental newness of Christian civilisation, notwithstanding its ancient origins, could become manifest. The church was thus compelled to build up a new civilisation out of its own spiritual creativeness. Islam, on the other hand, flourished at that time and enjoyed all the treas-



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ures of Hellenistic, Jewish and Oriental civilisation. Yet in this process, in which everything was snatched at random, Islam was bewildered. It soon had to face the alternative of barren orthodoxy, hostile to any civilisation, or of adapting itself so entirely to an existing civilisation that it lost its substance. Christianity, however, profited by this development. The Arabs brought their new civilisation to Spain, and from there its influence made itself felt upon western Christendom. The church which, after the Dark Ages, had matured and consolidated itself in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, was then strong enough to re-think its own problems and to assimilate new elements. At that moment it found itself confronted in Spain by an Arabian philosophy and theology based on the same ancient civilisation as Christianity. From the Arabs Christian theologians obtained extensive knowledge of the forgotten foundations of their theology, especially of Plato and Aristotle, but also of ancient science. But the Arabian philosophers had reached conclusions entirely opposite to those of traditional theology. Thus it was a question of life and death for Christian thinkers to discuss the problems raised by their Arabian rivals. This intellectual conflict gave rise to scholasticism. Christianity was enabled by the Arabs to avail itself of the treasures of antiquity, but at the same time was preserved from being estranged to itself. For Arabian philosophers pointed clearly to the insufficiency of philosophy, and thus compelled the Christian theologians to recognise the superiority of revelation over natural reason.

Of similar interest is the function of the Crusades. When the unity of Christianity was in danger of succumbing to the rise of modern nationalism, the religious enthusiasm of the

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Crusaders succeeded in bringing the European nations together once more.

Moreover, Christ always provides those means which at a given moment His church needs to perform its task. He knows the human weakness and shortcomings of His servants and takes them into due consideration. When the Divines, for example, neglected or depised Biblical truth at the end of the middle ages or put it on the same level as the views of the church fathers and the arguments of philosophers, God enabled laymen to study the Bible through the use of paper instead of costly parchment, printed books instead of manuscripts, and vernacular translations.

In a similar way the capture of Constantinople by the Turks was providential for the spread of the knowledge of Greek to the western world. The Western Church as a whole did not grasp the significance of this event, but believers among the learned soon realised that God offered them thereby a wonderful opportunity of studying the New Testament and early Christian literature in the original language. I do not think that the capture of Constantinople took place merely so that the Reformers should have the Greek text of the New Testament, but we see in that event how—notwithstanding the chaotic character of history in general—God directs holy history in such a way that even historical catastrophes contain new blessings for the church.

The divine character of the course of holy history is evidenced by the fact that Christ does not distribute His gifts according to the deserts of men, but rather in accordance with the needs of His church. Thus we do not think that those who inaugurated new developments in the history of Christianity



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or have discovered new aspects of revealed truth were on that account better or more religious than the rest. They may have been, but their achievements manifest primarily the wisdom and mercy of God.

But Christ sometimes deprives His church of what seems to be its strongest support in order to bring it back from trust in earthly means to trust in Himself personally. At a time, for example, when the Protestant Church had practically forgotten that the Lord Himself leads His church into all truth and when those who still clung to the truth indulged in the worship of the letter of the Bible, God allowed higher criticism to unmask the arbitrariness in this practice and to refute the theories which were meant to justify it. But higher criticism was not permitted thereby to destroy the authority of the Bible. This school, which tried to refute revelation by facts of experience, was itself refuted by facts. Recent excavations in the Near East, for example, overthrow most of the critical theories concerning the age, the trustworthiness, the truthfulness and the superiority of the Holy Scripture. Similarly when churches had become political organisations, as was the case in the Byzantine Empire or in Russia, Christ destroyed their political support so that they had to live exclusively on His spiritual gifts.

These few instances, which could easily be multiplied, will make plain how Christ Himself is at work in His church. By the power of His love, by the strength of His truth, and by His infinite wisdom He guides it and educates it in such a way that not only His glory becomes manifest through the meanness and feebleness of His followers, but also so that these followers are enabled to be His witnesses and to testify before the whole world to His Risen Life.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE MODERN SITUATION

#### A. THE TURNING POINTS OF HISTORY

THE two most important events in the history of modern mankind, and thereby in universal history, were the founding of the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation by Charlemagne, and the Reformation. Both belonged to holy history, but in fact their influence extended to the whole realm of history.

Charlemagne created the Occident as a political and cultural unity. As political sovereign he regarded himself as trustee and defender of the church. His aim was to bring about the closest possible connection between spiritual and political power; but this end was to be achieved by a personal arrangement between the leaders of Christianity, not by any organisational measure. The Emperor was expected to act as a Christian in all his political activities, and the Pope was supposed to grant all the support to his endeavors which the church could offer. In turn the Emperor regarded it as his duty to protect and foster the church. This conception led to an interpenetration of secular and religious life which reached its climax in the thirteenth century when the Papacy propagated the great idea of the Body Christian and when civilisation was completely tinged with religious ideas.



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But the unity, thus reached, gradually disintegrated after the thirteenth century because the union between secular and spiritual life had taken place on too limited a basis. Originally the agents of the union were the Emperor on the one hand, and the Pope (or the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church) on the other. All other men and women were regarded as mere subjects of the spiritual and secular powers, and as passive objects of their respective activities. This attitude was justified as long as the people of the West—unlike those of the ancient Mediterranean world—felt and acted as entities whose will was expressed by their sovereigns. But the Christian message and the educational activities of the church resulted in the gradual replacing of collective mentality by individual self-consciousness and self-respect. Hence the laity became unwilling to endure any longer the tutelage of the clergy, even as in the political field the commoners claimed their rightful place beside the monarch and his barons.

At the moment when the Occident seemed to be disintegrating completely and irreparably, the Reformers stepped into the breach and restored its unity. Roman Catholic and Anglican writers frequently blame the Reformation for destroying the unity of mediaeval Europe. They overlook, however, that that unity had actually broken down more than a hundred and fifty years before that time. In the fifteenth century the Roman Church not only was no longer capable of repressing the growing nationalism, but also was deeply involved, itself, in the rivalries of national groups. Moreover the opponents of Protestantism underrate the harmful effects of the Renaissance. For this movement did not confine itself to propagating a new understanding of ancient thought and art, but above all aimed

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at delivering secular life from supra-natural bondages. This strife for independence, if left to itself, would have rushed Europe into chaos. As Nietzsche rightly observed, it was Luther who curbed its growth.

Reformation and Renaissance had a common origin—the general dissatisfaction with the mediaeval idea of unity, and the widespread desire for a personal form of life. They differed essentially, however, in their aims. The Reformers strove after a new unity, in which God, the universe, and the ego should be brought together in a personal way by means of faith. The Renaissance, on the other hand, aimed at a solution which would guarantee the maximum of independence to the individual living in the universe. Their solution was the pantheism of Giordano Bruno and Paracelsus, or Descartes' belief in the creativeness of the ego. Practically this attitude led to the cult of "great men" and to the assumption that the more vigorous and enterprising a man felt himself to be—the more he could be certain that he was right.

The Reformers were not able to overcome this new tendency entirely, yet they kept it within certain limits and thus prevented it from splitting up the Occident into an infinite number of conflicting groups. The influence which the Reformers exercised was felt by the Roman Church in a deeper and more direct way than by the secular world. The Counter-Reformation most certainly would not have taken place had it not been that the success and inherent truth of Protestantism had convinced the better elements in the Roman Church that a basic transformation was demanded. Post-Trentine Catholicism is almost a new religion as compared with mediaeval Christianity. Both groups brought about real reintegrations of all de-



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partments of life on a Christian basis. Thus the presence of two such vigorous bodies as Protestantism and the renewed Roman Church checked for a long time the growth of secularism which resulted from the Renaissance.

### B. GENESIS OF THE PRESENT SITUATION

Although the Protestant and the Roman Catholic group had much in common, and had a common foe to fight, their mutual antagonism and rivalries preoccupied them almost completely during the sixteenth and most of the seventeenth centuries, and this diverted their interest from the new secular movement that had grown up between them. Their confessional controversies absorbed their creative faculties. So deeply were they impressed by the cultural achievements of the Renaissance and the movements which originated from it that they overlooked the danger which menaced them from the secularism inherent in it. Each in turn regarded the new movement as a helpful ally against the other church. Thus it came about that both were gradually brought more and more under the influence of the new secularism. The Catholic section succumbed first to its attraction, and the century of Louis XIV was its mature outcome.

Protestants on the whole showed greater reluctance, and their protest against the merely secular movements was still very strong during the eighteenth century: German Pietism, the Moravian movement under Zinzendorf, Wesley, Whitefield and the "Great Awakening" bear witness to it. But in the great idealistic movement which was headed almost exclusively by Protestants such as Goethe, Schiller, Kant, Hegel, for instance, Protestantism in turn surrendered almost completely to

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secular ideas. In the whole western world political and social theories, history, science, the arts were conceived of, at that time, as being independent of Biblical revelation and as having their basis in the natural facts of life. The French Revolution gave similar views a powerful triumph by granting them the full support of the state.

The churches felt themselves helpless. Theology became historical and critical, but although it yielded great and important results in the historical field it lost sight of its very substance—the revealed truth of God. The great revival movements of the nineteenth century, while bringing personal blessing to many individuals, nevertheless increased the aloofness of the church, and thus involuntarily contributed to widening the gulf between secular life and Christianity. Even earnest Christians did not entirely escape the influence of their secular surroundings. The egocentric attitude of modern humanism which in social life had resulted in the disintegration of the existing groups and organisations fostered an entirely individualistic outlook in religion as well. The problems of salvation were treated as though no world and no fellow men existed outside of the believing individual. In the Anglican Church the leaders of the Oxford Movement a hundred years ago made a desperate effort to bring the church back to a truly catholic understanding of its nature, but the great reformatory movement of Newman, Keble and Pusey ended in ritualism and romanticism or in the Roman Church. Whereas the Roman Church had been capable of tolerating various modes of Christian life and thought within its body without losing its identity, Protestantism developed intolerant sectarianism. Thus it split up into innumerable denominations and sects,



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each of which believed it alone knew the full truth. Another bad effect which contemporary individualism had upon the church was the lack of interest in social problems and in questions of theological cosmology.

Finally the secular mentality generated positivism—the assumption that nothing but objects of sense experience are real, and that nothing is true but what can be known by inference from data of sense experience and the basic axioms of the human intellect. The most obvious result of this change was the abandoning of the idea of teleology. But this was but a symptom of a deeper loss. Men had become unable to assume that the world was at bottom mysterious. No philosophy of nature was conceivable on this basis, and psychology, the youngest child of this development, was arrogant in its presumption without thereby satisfying the yearnings of human souls. This development explains the pitiful impoverishment of modern life. In order to be successful the whole picture of life was simplified. But in this way man has laws of nature only, instead of experience of nature's formative and destructive forces; diagrams of developments instead of vivid pictures of the process, abstract notions instead of intuitions of life.

Yet the church would not be the Body of Christ if this process of secularisation were the whole truth. It is wonderful to see how the Risen Lord makes use of even the failures and faults of His servants and how He thus builds up His church. Two phenomena are particularly remarkable in the history of the last two centuries: the great missionary impulse and the creation of the new types of Christian communities. As an implication of the Protestant conception of faith the obligation

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to care for the spread of the Gospel was laid upon the individual Christian. The result was the remarkable evangelism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by which Protestantism was propagated all over Europe, not primarily by ecclesiastical or political authorities but by individuals. When finally in the eighteenth century the balance of Protestantism and Catholicism seemed to have become definite, the zeal of individual Protestants sought new fields of activity and found them among the heathen.

Moreover, some of the smaller groups of Protestantism re-established what had been lost in the disintegrative processes of the fifteenth century—community life on a Christian basis. Although the experiments of the Quakers, Moravians, Mennonites, Hutterian Brethren and other groups have never expanded beyond relatively small circles, they have helped to keep alive the idea in Protestantism that fellowship in daily life is an essential element of the Body of Christ.

The great achievements of the new secular mentality, during the last two hundred years, have transformed our political, economic, social and cultural life. But while some thirty years ago people still believed that these changes were all for good, now we all know that they have created tensions which are no longer tolerable. Yet this is the tragic situation in which we live: these tensions cannot be assuaged by the application of those principles upon which this whole secular civilisation is built. Thus secular man finds himself in a state of despair. Symptoms of occidental pessimism and nihilism were numerous in the nineteenth century and have increased constantly. In the twentieth century the apostasy from Christian belief spread from the upper classes to the masses, and civilisation



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consequently was debased to materialism. The final stage of this process is modern totalitarianism. Thereby modern man definitely renounces humanism as the basis of his existence, and has recourse to brutish violence. Moreover, while the Renaissance and the movements which issued from it had promised to lead the individual to full independence, in our day people feel overstrained by the exacting demands which individualism has made upon personal thought, initiative and responsibility and they indulge in all forms of collective life (daily press, radio, cinema, mass meetings, mass organisations) by which they are supplied with standardised opinions and suggestions. All these developments show that the process which began with the Renaissance has practically come to an end.

### C. THE PRESENT CONDITION OF THE CHURCH

For a long time church people closed their eyes to the miserable plight of the modern world. As a result of the relatively peaceful and secure position of the church in most countries they overlooked the fact that the church itself was deeply involved in the process of modern disintegration. Thus God used the Great War and its consequences as a means of awakening self-complacent churches and individual Christians to a recognition of the true nature of the world. The churches had to learn that the Gospel does not deal with a mere concept of God, but with a God who is operative in this world, and who delivers us from the activity of the powers of evil which are also at work in a very realistic way. Modern Christianity begins to realise that the nature of this world does not justify an easy-going optimism or a belief in man's innate goodness.

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If there is a God at all He must be one Who is strong enough to overcome all the absurdities and contradictions of this world. Moreover recent developments in history have brought home to Christianity that this earth and mankind have become an empirical unity. But this also involves the fact that spiritually the whole world has become a battlefield between Christianity and the secular mind. The latter may operate openly as, for example, in communistic atheism, or be religiously disguised as, for example, in State Shinto in Japan or in National Socialism's claim to limit the range of spiritual truth. The end for which these powers strive is nevertheless always the same: they want to determine their actions according to their own arbitrary decisions irrespective of God's revelation and His presence in the church. This is no longer a situation when a denomination may think: "Thank God, it was our rival who got it!" For at present the secular powers are arrayed against the Christian truth as such, no longer against a denomination or a national church only.

All these movements which oppose Christ have the emotional appeal of a religion. It is easy to ridicule them; they are, nevertheless, believed and obeyed by millions because they are the kind of substitute for religion which modern man wants. Even as he prefers the cinema to the stage, he finds greater pleasure in the display of military power and glamour than in the puritan simplicity of a chapel service, and he is more deeply impressed by a political ceremony in memory of great national events than by the celebration of the vigil of our Lord's Crucifixion.

This whole development cannot be interpreted as proving that Christianity was the religion of a specific type of western



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mankind only, namely that of the middle ages. It is true that the connection between Christian and secular life was particularly close in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but hardly to a greater extent than in Calvin's Geneva, Cromwell's Commonwealth, Penn's first colony, or the Scotland of the second half of the nineteenth century, to give only a few instances. It is historically untrue to say that the "bourgeois" type of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was by nature antithetic to Christianity. For while some of its leaders fought the Christian belief, others helped to create a new type of Christianity, which left its traces in the great revival movements. Mankind produces different types of men in different ages, and each of them impresses its marks on the life and thought of the church. But no type is by nature hostile towards, or incompatible with, Christianity, and while the various types of man alter its form, none of them is able to affect its substance. Whatever therefore the type of man may be that is to succeed the present "bourgeois" type, whether it be a warrior type, as some German writers prophesy, or a technical type, as most Americans seem to believe, or some other type of uniform and collectivistic man, the chance of survival for Christianity will not be lessened by any of them.

For however precarious the present situation of the church may be, Christ so loves it that he never abandons it. This can be seen in the great changes which He brings about in His church in our day. Until recently the churches thought that the only way to meet the new situation which secularism had brought about in the modern world, was to adapt themselves to it. This tendency has now been curbed, although it has not yet completely disappeared. The church is now becoming

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aware of the fact that it had digressed from the path of life and deserted its Lord. The characteristic of modern Christianity is the increasing emphasis on personal communion with Jesus Christ Himself. Christians are convinced that neither skilful methods of religious education and church organisation, nor new and interesting theological theories can heal the wounds of Christ's body, but only the Lord Himself.

A fundamental change is simultaneously taking place in theology and in church life. In theology we notice a return to Christian realism which has its roots in the rediscovery of the genuine theology of the Reformers and in a new approach to the Bible. This theological revival is a very hopeful sign. For supra-natural realism is the only force by which the materialistic or idealistic type of lower realism can be overcome. Such beliefs as those in great men, in one's country, race and class, however inconsistent they may be, cannot be successfully refuted by pointing out their logical absurdities. For they are held because in an immensely growing and rapidly changing world people want a firm hold, and they rightly feel that facts alone can render this service, theories never. They must therefore be shown that there is a reality more powerful than these empirical ones which they dread and yet worship.

The change in church life which characterises our time is the practical outcome of the new Christian realism. Our generation learns again that it is Christ Himself who forms the church as His body here on earth. Hence it is not the purity of our faith or of moral life, not the beauty, frequency or correctness of the church ritual which makes us partakers of the body of Christ, but only our willingness to make use of the means of



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grace which He Himself has instituted. This new conception of the church makes itself felt in the reduction of the number of purely social events in the local churches and in the activities of the great Christian youth organisation, and in a new appreciation of worship and expository preaching. On foreign missions, too, this change of outlook has had its repercussions. There is greater willingness than ever to put the evangelistic duty of the church first, and a greater readiness for coöperation prevails among the missionary bodies of the different denominations, as can be seen, for example, in the establishment of the International Council of Missions.

This leads us to another change in church life, which finds expression in the ecumenical movements. Never since the unity of the church was shattered in the Great Schism has there been such readiness on the part of the different churches to mutually recognise their underlying unity. This movement for unity is typically different from efforts for the union of ecclesiastical organisations for practical purposes. The two great movements of "Life and Work" and "Faith and Order" regard the question of union as a secondary one and strive to develop awareness of the spiritual unity which the churches already possess through the fact that they are the Body of Christ. On this basis it is possible for each church to recognise the rightness and value of differing conceptions in the other churches, and also to acknowledge the guilt which all of them have contracted by their lack of love and mutual understanding. The result of the ecumenical movement is a mutual exchange of spiritual experiences between the different churches, and an increased willingness to assist suffering members of the Lord's Body, independent of denominational ties.

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### D. THE MEANING OF THE PRESENT SITUATION

Does our interpretation of recent history enable us to say anything definite about the meaning of the historical situation in which we are now living? We are no prophets and therefore have to be particularly careful in our diagnosis because we have no special revelation of God to guide us in this respect. But I think every period is in a position to venture a judgment concerning itself. The Bible and the accumulated experience of the church will be sufficient to guide us if only our judgment is based upon belief in Christ.

The period in which we live is undoubtedly one in which Satan is allowed to concentrate his attacks on the church more intensely than for a long time past. We have much reason to take seriously the fate of the churches in Russia, Spain, Mexico and Germany and in many of the foreign mission fields. For what has happened to them may befall other churches at any time. It is not in the power of man's wisdom to protect the church against a diabolic adversary. Although we do not know all the secrets of the divine counsel, we can say nevertheless that in the failures and persecutions of the church, as well as in the state of perplexity and despair in which our world lives at present, we see God's judgment passed on secularism, both inside and outside the church. A world, which confided in its own wisdom and trusted in its own strength, suddenly realises that it is unable to restrain its members from damaging and destroying one another. The League of Nations was the last heroic effort of the western world to stop this development. The attempt has failed and it is useless to say that the principle underlying the League was good, for it was impracticable un-



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less operated on a suitable spiritual basis, which Christianity alone could offer. We cannot foretell how far the wrath of God against our generation and that of our children will go. But why should God spare modern civilisation, since He has destroyed that of Rome and of all other empires of antiquity? Or has the white race any legitimate right to lead mankind indefinitely? It is not inconceivable to think of a complete overturn of the present balance of power among the human races. The white race may have forfeited the leadership to which God had appointed it when He transferred the center of the church to central and western Europe.

Similarly it may be that other western churches will share the fate of those in Russia and Germany, and that the collapse of the occidental churches will compel the indigenous churches in Africa and Asia to emancipate themselves altogether from western influence and tutelage. However much compassion we feel for the sister churches in distress, we must not be blind to the fact that their miserable plight is the righteous judgment of God, and that the other churches which are in a more fortunate situation should thank God for His forbearance and mercy that so far He has withheld punishment from them.

Christians should not therefore seek comfort in the idea that all the violent movements of our days will one day break down. Their annihilation certainly will take place. But are we so certain that our church will survive such a catastrophe? May it not be destroyed even before all the dictators and war-lords of our day see their ends defeated by the God of History?

But the divine judgment which is being carried out or is imminent in these days is but one aspect of the present situation. Since it is God's purpose to manifest His glory to all His

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creatures, modern history cannot be understood merely as a period of decline. It is true that even from the point of view of historical comparison the last decades do not give much occasion for boasting. There is, on the contrary, much reason for repentance both for liberal and conservative theologians, high church and low church men, Anglo-Catholics and Quakers. But there is also much reason to praise Christ that He has safely piloted His church through so many failures and provided it with a new start.

In all His dealings Christ acts both as a righteous Judge and as the Head of His Church which He loves. He resists the proud who trust in their own wisdom, and He does not even spare members of His church; but He is anxious to maintain a community on earth which will continue His work in history. The dissociation of the church and Christian religion from secular civilisation and public life which characterized to an increasing extent the modern history of western mankind was not altogether a defeat of the church. For by this development the church was compelled to search for its distinctiveness and its specific function in society. By rediscovering its own nature and its supra-historical origin in Christ the church was enabled to realise its superiority over all other groups and to challenge their unfounded claims for self-sufficiency and unlimited sovereignty. Although they may persecute the church and ridicule Christian faith, the very existence of the church makes manifest their insufficiency (for instance, by means of the theocentric and christocentric trends in modern theology, as opposed to any kind of humanism or positivism), and the church feels strong enough to withstand the full impact of political power and, by its resistance, manifests the fallibility



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of its adversaries (for instance in the church conflicts in France, Russia, Germany, or Korea).

These and other signs of a new beginning to which we have pointed above should encourage all Christians whose hearts fail them for despair and perplexity. Thanks to our Lord our churches have not yet been destroyed, and thus we should accept every new day from His hands as a time of probation. Are His churches willing to return to Him again, to trust only in His power and wisdom and to serve His cause alone? God's temporal judgments are meant to bring men to repentance. This is the chance that the Lord grants His church.

It is from this consideration that we may find a last slight hope for the western world. It has certainly perpetrated the greatest sin that can be committed—apostasy. Every sin will be forgiven except the deliberate rejection of the Gospel. Nations in this respect come under the same law as individuals. When Charlemagne founded his empire the western peoples entered into the heritage of God's "chosen people." In vain do our contemporaries imagine, therefore, that they can forsake what their fathers have begun. The life of our generation is built upon age-long Christian civilisation, and, what is even more important, the union between church and state which was established in the middle ages was of the nature of a divine covenant. Thereby the western nations were enabled to obtain hegemony in the world, but they were also obliged to recognise Christ as their Saviour. Hence the modern indifference shown for Christianity and the Gospel and the ruthless pursuit of political ends, irrespective of moral or religious considerations, are certainly gloomy signs of apostasy.

What, nevertheless, seems to give the Occident a last hope

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is the fact that the sin of apostasy has not yet been fully consummated. Even Russia has refrained so far from completely destroying the church, and all the other western powers tolerate Christianity, although they no longer accept directions from the church. This toleration does not wipe out their guilt, but it offers them a last chance of returning in repentance to Christ. On the other hand, this critical situation confers a great responsibility upon the church. The fact that the modern world took a purely secular course was not only due to the ill will of unbelievers but also to the shortcomings and faults of the church. The neo-paganism of our day may thus be the first symptom of a change for the better; namely, the realisation that the world cannot live or work effectively unless it is consciously linked up with supra-natural realities. But if in such a situation the word of God should be preached anew, and rejected, the sin of apostasy would be consummated and all hope gone. The church cannot discharge its duty of preaching repentance by interfering directly with the political and social life of our day. This way was practicable in the early middle ages, but since then the church itself has educated individuals to personal responsibility. Hence even problems of institutional life have to be dealt with by the church in an indirect way. The church will not be able to heal this sick world by creating special organisations for combatting the anti-God movements and the new substitute religions. It certainly has the obligation to denounce gallantly and fearlessly their anti-Christian character; but its proper work must be constructive rather than critical. The contribution which the church can make in this critical hour of world history consists in becoming aware of its potential treasures and making use of them for the



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good of the world. The more resolutely the church frees itself from the influence of secularism, the more effectively will it enable the world to get rid of it also. It is not necessary to set up large machinery for the performance of this task. The Gospel itself is so powerful for the purpose of raising men that it does not need the technique of modern mass organisations. On the contrary the first service which the church can render to our world consists in bringing back simplicity and peace and restfulness to a complicated technical world full of haste and noise. People seldom realise how much the habits of regular prayer, the quiet of a Sunday, and the meditation on eternal truth contribute to the mental health of individuals and nations. The irritability which in our day characterises individuals and nations alike is the direct outcome of the constant unrest in which they live.

Furthermore, the church possesses the secret of true community life and can communicate it to a world which is in a state of social disintegration. But except in small groups, this secret has been almost completely lost and the church must acknowledge the guilt which it has thereby contracted towards the world. Protestantism in this respect was even worse off than Catholicism. Whereas the Reformation kindled the light of freedom for mankind, the Protestant churches did not teach adequately and emphatically enough, in theory and practice, that community life was the necessary complement of liberty. Our contemporaries try to heal this omission by mass organisations, regimentation, and compulsory service. Yet things can only improve when the churches themselves practice personal fellowship, charity, forgiveness, love and service among their members. As Wilfred Monod said, "The Church is the fel-

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lowship of those who love in the service of those who suffer." I do not think that all social problems can be solved in this way, but even as the fellowship of the church has done away with slavery, the example of fellowship set by the church will transform the whole structure of social life. The goods of this world are divine gifts and are therefore destined for the use of the whole of mankind. When people accumulate them and keep them for themselves they are punished by God with wars, economic crises and revolutions by means of which their goods are taken away from them. Yet these catastrophes cannot bring about a righteous distribution which will last forever. Only Christian example can indicate the ways in which wealth of the world can be constantly redistributed in a satisfactory manner.

Again, the church alone is able by its example to teach the world how to overcome discord and antagonism between classes, races and nations. For Christ has shown us how, notwithstanding individual and racial differences, men can be one. While the secular mind oscillates between abstract uniformity on the one hand and belief in the absolute value of particular features on the other, the Christian idea of the Body of Christ unites the two views to a higher synthesis. The peculiarities of persons, groups and races are acknowledged as divine gifts, but they are deemed valuable only when used in the service of the whole body. The entire activity of the church in the social and political field will be futile unless it is recognised what a heavy responsibility rests upon the Christian communities. How shall the world believe in the possibility of peace and understanding among nations, when the churches, which preach peace and love, fight each other or show indiffer-



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ence for one another? And what right has the church to denounce anti-semitism as long as there is a color bar within the church? Or why should a worker believe in the irrelevance of class distinctions when the lack of a formal suit will practically bar his access to church worship on Sunday morning?

Finally, the church can offer the world a way of overcoming the belief in self-sufficiency and anarchy which poisons present-day international life. The factual unity of mankind which exists at present is not regarded by the nations as a good in itself, but merely as a means to satisfy their selfish aspirations. That is to say: In our day political conflicts are fought out on a world-wide scale. But the church has the power to bring about a higher and worthier conception of the unity of mankind. This can be done by ecumenical movements and missionary activities throughout the non-Christian world. Thereby churches show their willingness as members of Christ's body to depend on one another and to bring those who are still outside into this fellowship. Evangelisation and home missions serve a similar purpose. It is no exaggeration to say that churches which do not think and care for the whole Body of their Lord, degenerate quickly. On the other hand, the work of the church at large creates a new mentality of mutual respect and a spirit of mutual responsibility, which will inevitably influence the social and political sphere as well.

For a long time the change may be one in outlook and evaluation only; but in the end the conduct of man will also be changed thereby. I do not think that the church will ever be able to transform this whole world into a theocracy; nor does God require this from her. The Occident will be saved, if

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there is a small minority, a "remnant" who feel constrained by the love of Christ to assume full responsibility for all their contemporaries, and the world is prepared to accept this service.



CHAPTER IX  
CONCLUSION

THE END OF HISTORY

ONE more question remains to be answered. Does our interpretation of the present situation imply that the end of history is at hand? May we expect Christ in His glory to soon come back to this world? I do not think that a definite answer can be given to these questions. Some signs of the times, above all the rise of new religions which copy Christianity, seem to point to the reign of anti-Christ. Other signs, that according to Biblical revelation must be connected with the final end of history, particularly the preaching of the Gospel to all nations, cannot yet be discerned. Thus the attitude which it behooves us to adopt is one of watchfulness. We have to work as though we had a full lifetime ahead, but, at the same time, must be prepared at any moment to see the end of all this earthly toil and trouble. I think nothing can be more harmful to such watchfulness than apocalyptic calculations, which pretend to give the precise date of the Lord's coming with unfailing certainty. Jesus Himself has told us that the Father has reserved to Himself the secret of this hour. Moreover, such pious presumptions will have a detrimental effect upon men's faith. People will then live continually in the expectation of the hour so passionately longed for, and in the meantime will be indifferent to what Christ is now carrying out.

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But some will object to this view that the idea of an end of history is unnecessary and useless. Why should the historical process not go on indefinitely, and mankind advance by means of technical progress to an age of perfect happiness, as H. G. Wells foretells? Facts, however, bluntly contradict such expectations. Any analysis of history which takes into consideration empirical factors only will reach the following alternatives: either the vitality inherent in mankind will shrink continuously and after a long and painful period of degeneration and atrophy be one day exhausted, since man is a finite being; or it may be that conditions of life on this earth will become intolerable for all organic creatures as a result of the decreasing temperature of this planet. This perspective, it is true, would still leave mankind a considerable number of millenniums at its disposal. Nevertheless if people would once think it through, they would discover how unsatisfactory the whole outlook is. For individual life would have no meaning in itself. We should then live for a future which neither we nor our grandchildren would ever see. The whole process would also have no satisfactory meaning since it would be bound to end in a catastrophe rather than in happiness.

From the Christian point of view the end of history is certain to come to pass—whether in connection with the physical end of mankind or previous to it, we do not know. The reasons why the idea of the end of history is so essential to our belief are these: (1) History needs an end which is itself beyond history, because thus alone can the purpose of God fully be carried out. Everything in history serves God's glory, but in most cases its particular meaning and function are not manifest. As to most of the successes and failures of history,



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we do not know how they are connected with the purpose of God. Similarly we know that in the Body of Christ every individual member has eternal significance, and that we do not work merely for future generations. But if there were no opportunity of knowing exactly what our life was meant for, and contributed to, our historical existence would not differ from that of any plant or animal which serves to build up the life of this globe. Hence this earthly historical life must be followed by a timeless, yet conscious, communion with Christ.

(2) Surely even in this life, our belief or unbelief places us in heaven or hell. But few men are fully aware of this state, and how could even they know that such belief was not an illusion, if earthly life were not followed by the resurrection of the dead and conscious life in heaven or hell? Hence divine judgment must take place one day so that individual men may become aware of their fate.

It is for these two reasons that as Christians we cannot live in history without connecting this life with the expectation of the end of history and the life to come. This eschatological outlook does not imply, as it is sometimes interpreted, that the historical process goes from bad to worse. This cannot be so, because Jesus Christ has already overcome Satan. Although this evil foe is still allowed to harm men, his power is not only definitely limited; it is broken. However hidden the triumphs of Christ may be in this aeon, they are none the less real. What makes some periods appear more diabolical than others is the strategy by which Satan sometimes attacks, at a certain point, a certain church or group of Christians.

Thus from the Christian point of view history has its ups and downs. We are never "beyond tragedy" in this historical

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life, for we share the sufferings of our Lord. Our life is "*cruca tecta*," covered by the Cross. The evils of this world press particularly hard upon Christians, for it is against them that the wrath of the Prince of this world is kindled. But we must not be disturbed by the vicissitudes of history. For they lead straight on to the glorious manifestation of Christ. In the meantime nothing can separate us from His love. He promises: "Surely I come quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.



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